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LECTURES
ON THE
BOOK OF REVELATION.

J. BROWN.

LECTURES
ON THE
BOOK OF REVELATION.

LECTURES

ON THE

BOOK OF REVELATION,

DELIVERED IN

BUNYAN MEETING, BEDFORD,

BY

JOHN BROWN, B.A.

"The Apocalypses of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies."—*MILTON*.



LONDON :

F. PITMAN, 20, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1866.

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PREFACE.

THESE lectures were projected, and more than half of them delivered to the people it is my happiness to serve in the Gospel, before I had any thought of their seeing the light in their present form. It was only after many entreaties on the part of others, and much hesitation on my own, that I consented to their publication. And this, not because of misgivings as to the soundness of the views advanced, but rather from a deep and unaffected consciousness of my unworthiness to deal adequately with so exalted a theme. Yet even a little help may be welcome to some ; and I was anxious that those who had heard these lectures should be able to review, as a whole, that exposition which had, of course, been brought before them in separate parts, and at intervals extending over several months.

To choose the Apocalypse as the subject of a series of lectures is in these days rather perilous to a man's reputation for common sense. The book has furnished occasion for the display of so many wild vagaries, that he who again attempts to unfold its meaning lays himself open to the suspicion that he has abandoned wholesome teaching, and in moonings about seals and vials, trumpets and dragons, is wasting time that might be better employed. Yet, who that believes that the evidence for the genuineness and authenticity of this book of the Revelation is equal to that of any other part of the canon does not regret that it has become the special hunting-ground of fanatics and day-

dreamers? Who that believes that in it we have a veritable portion of the mind of the Spirit does not wish to do something, however little, to roll back its reproach, and to excite the search of a more reverent inquiry? With this hope, I have sought to interpret this part of Scripture by the light of the rest, and have especially sought to bring out the spiritual lessons which all have found therein, however wide apart they have been in their views of its general structure.

Among those who may read these pages, there will be, of course, difference of opinion as to the views here adopted. I am happy to say that they do not now seek for acceptance for the first time. The scheme of the book of Revelation, and the general principles of interpretation I have followed, were set forth in a series of articles that appeared about twenty years ago in the *Biblical Review*. Some parts of the scheme had been suggested long before. For example—Andreas of Cæsarea, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, written between A.D. 450 and 500, speaking of the dire portents at the opening of the sixth seal, when there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth (vi. 12), says that there were those in his time “who applied this passage to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus.” Arethas, his immediate successor, also wrote a commentary on this book, which is valuable as a catena from different authors. Writing upon the vision of the seven seals, he says, “Here there were manifestly shown to the evangelist what things were to befall the Jews in their war against the Romans.” Hentenius, in his preface to the Latin version of Arethas (Paris, 1547), hinted at a further division of the book, which applied it to the Jewish enemies of the Christian Church, to heathenism, and to the worldly powers with

which the Church would have to contend. The latter part of the book was referred to the final conquest, rest, and ultimate glorification of the Church. These views were further developed by Alcassar, in a book published in 1614. Herrensneider, in his work on the Revelation (1786), also found therein the overthrow of Judaism and heathenism, and the universal triumph of the Church. But while there have been many feelings after a simpler and more spiritual interpretation of this important part of Scripture, I have found nowhere such help and satisfaction as in the anonymous articles I have mentioned, and which too soon shared in that forgetfulness which is the usual fate of the onflowing stream of periodical literature.

Ten years ago there appeared a metrical translation of the Apocalypse, with Scripture references, by Professor Godwin, of New College. I have frequently availed myself of that translation; and as it is manifestly from the same pen as the articles I have mentioned, I would express to its author my most grateful sense of obligation.

I have received help also in translation and exposition from "Lectures on the Revelation of St. John," by Dr. C. J. Vaughan, of Doncaster. These lectures he has avowedly based on Hengstenberg's scheme entirely, and so far they are to me unsatisfactory; but his translation is that of a scholar; his exposition has all the characteristic excellences of his writings; and the work is a welcome addition to the libraries even of those who are unable to accept the scheme he has chosen.

I have throughout addressed myself necessarily to a mixed congregation, and have therefore passed by many questions of interest to some. But there is one matter on which I wish here to say a word or two. It will be seen at once that the scheme adopted assumes that the Apostle John received the Revelation before the destruction of

Jerusalem. There is, however, a very generally received tradition that he was banished to Patmos, under Domitian; and this would give as the date of the book, A.D. 96, or twenty-six years after the overthrow of the city. It is neither possible nor desirable for me to enter into the whole question here. I will merely refer to one or two arguments, based on the internal evidence, which have had great weight with me in favour of the earlier date, A.D. 68. The apostle wrote both his Gospel and the Apocalypse in the Greek language, while his native tongue was that form of the Hebrew known as the Aramaic. In the Apocalypse there are very many Hebraisms, and in the Gospel very few. Now if an Englishman were to write two books in the French language, one of them in good, idiomatic French, and the other with very many Anglicisms in its style, it would be fair to conclude that the latter had been written at an earlier period than the former, and clearly marked a shorter acquaintance with the foreign language. It seems to me that the argument applies in the case of the apostle, inspiration notwithstanding, and necessitates a much earlier date for the Apocalypse than for the Gospel, which was written in A.D. 97. The differences in style were pointed out very early, and are universally admitted. Even Dean Alford, who is in favour of the later date, says, they "must be freely acknowledged," and states that the difficulty thus occasioned "has never yet been fairly solved."

Then again it seems to me that those writers have made out their case, who, by a minute comparison of various passages in the earlier chapters of the Revelation, have endeavoured to show that as yet the Jewish power was unbroken, and Jerusalem not yet destroyed, when John beheld the visions in Patmos.

The opinion in favour of the later date rests almost

entirely on the testimony of Irenæus, and I freely admit that that testimony is explicit enough. He says plainly that John was exiled under Domitian. But Irenæus did not directly receive the account from Polycarp, the friend of the apostle. He was only a boy when he saw him, and appeals to what others had heard from him. But even at that early time there was great uncertainty on small points of tradition; and if it be said that Irenæus plainly mentions the exile of John as taking place under Domitian, it is perhaps sufficient to answer that he as plainly appeals to the testimony of all the presbyters in Lesser Asia, who had been in the society of the apostle, that Jesus was about fifty years old. In the words of Neander, "We cannot acknowledge his account (of the time of the apostle's banishment) as sufficiently accredited. It is, indeed, possible that it proceeded only from a peculiar interpretation of this obscure book, and not from any historical testimony. And if the Apocalypse contains certain marks of having been written before this time, this opinion would at once cease to be tenable. *As this is really the case, the Apocalypse must have been written soon after the death of Nero.*" Ols-hausen also gives it as his opinion, that "the internal characteristics of the book show that it was written in the early part of John's life, *before Jerusalem was destroyed.*" Equally decided is Stier, when he says, "Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, which was one of the comings of Christ, almost simultaneous with it, and yet *beholding* beforehand what he afterwards survived, St. John received the Revelation, in which the Lord says, 'Behold I come!' Not under Domitian, but under Nero, was the apostle banished to desolate Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." I may further mention that Dr. Davidson, in his "Introduction to the New Testament," published in 1851, contended strongly for the later date of

Domitian's reign; but in an article from his pen on the Revelation, in the third volume of Kitto's Cyclopædia, issued this year, he abandons that view and contends for the earlier date. And, having said thus much, I must now leave the matter to the judgment of my readers.

No one can be more painfully aware of the grievous defects of this little work than I am myself. It has been prepared amidst the constant demands and inevitable interruptions of a minister's life. Still it is the result of an honest endeavour to reach the truth, and to give it to others; and I would humbly commend it to the blessing of the good Lord who makes use of the feeblest instruments to strengthen the life of His Church.

BEDFORD, *November 3rd*, 1866.

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

I.

THE PALACE OF VISION.

REVELATION i.-iv.

How grandly a man may rise above the sorrowful surroundings of this world when God comes down upon him! John Bunyan, being cast into Bedford jail for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, was yet never more at large than when prisoner there. His sanctified genius, like the angel that came to Peter, led him forth from prison to a more than earthly liberty. With Christian he gazed on the wondrous sights of the Interpreter's house, or went to the Palace Beautiful, where together they slept in the chamber of peace that looks towards the sun-rising. Sometimes, it is true, a solemn dreadfulness was upon him when his pilgrim was fighting with Apollyon or trembling in the valley; but glory alternates with gloom, and by and by he was upon the Delectable Mountains or in the land of Beulah. Or perhaps he was lingering by the river that has no bridge, hearing from afar the music of harpers harping with their harps, and gazing on the open gates of the celestial city, watching the waves of glory as they come surging to and fro through the portal. We need not wonder that he could sing, as sing he did,—

“For though men keep my outward man
Within their locks and bars,
Yet, by the faith of Christ, I can
Mount higher than the stars.”

Let us now step back, not two centuries only, but eighteen, and we shall behold a yet more illustrious prisoner

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for conscience sake, and yet Diviner visions than these. In the old Roman times the Isle of Patmos, in the Icarian Sea, was a convict settlement, and hither was banished the apostle John, that disciple whom Jesus loved. It was then, what it is now, a scene of uttermost desolation. One solitary palm-tree, a few poor olives and cypresses alone relieve its inland dreariness, while round its rocky shores there is something cheerless in the moan of the waves, and the cry of the sea-birds as they sweep before the gale.

A man whose joy depended upon outside pleasant conditions would soon find this storm-tossed island a miserable place. But hither to the beloved disciple came the Master Himself, and that changed everything. When He came, the place was no longer desolate, but radiant with a brighter glory than ever rested on the palace of the Cæsars. John has described for us the wondrous transformation. It was the Lord's day, the day held sacred as a festival of the disciples because of the resurrection of their Master, the day of special breaking of bread in communion.

The apostle was in the spirit. Divine inspiration was beating down upon him. His whole being was in communion with the spiritual world. To that alone he was "all eye, all ear, all soul." Thus borne out of himself, in a condition ecstatic, so that whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, he saw once more that Lord Jesus whom he had not seen since the memorable day of the ascent from Olivet. Now His form was far more glorious to behold than even on that mount where, at a still earlier time, John had seen His transfiguration. His garment was the long ample robe of judicial and kingly power, and it was girded with a golden girdle. The hair of His head was white with the blinding splendour of His holiness and His glory; His eyes were as a flame of fire, so searching, so consuming; His feet were like fine brass, burning in a furnace, the very symbol of unwearied endurance and irresistible strength; while His voice was as the sound of many waters, so impressive, so majestic, so all pervading. In His hand were the seven stars of the seven Churches; out of His mouth went the sharp sword of the Spirit, which

pierces through the soul, and finds the spirit within ; and His face was as the sun when he shineth in his strength, so dazzling, so confounding to the gaze of man. When he saw the Saviour thus glorified, John fell at His feet as dead. But, with the right hand of strength, the Lord lifted up the prostrate disciple, and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last: I am the living One ; I became dead, and, behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages ; and I have the keys of death and of hades." Thus in might and majesty stands the Prince of life before His astonished servant, to whom He entrusts His commissions. He gives to him the searching, judging, consoling epistles to the seven Churches, among whom, as in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, He, their great Head, was for ever walking.

These being given, the vision widens. Through an open door there comes a beckoning voice, and John follows into a magnificent chamber of audience. The sight within is wonderful. On a throne of dazzling light, before which there gleams a crystal sea, the King Eternal is seated. The canopy over Him is a rainbow, like unto an emerald. Round about Him are lesser thrones, on which are seated crowned officers of state. Golden lamps burn brightly in His presence ; thunders, lightnings, and voices proceed from His throne, while unheard-of forms of living creatures bow before Him.

In His hand there is a scroll having seven seals. The Lion of the tribe of Judah comes forth and takes possession of that scroll ; and, as one by one He opens the seals, the vision increases in interest and sublimity to its close. That close is marked by a solemn silence which prevails for the space of half an hour.

Then the awful stillness is broken by the sounding of seven trumpets ; and another section of the Revelation revolves before us, and reaches its end.

Still the visions are continued. In striking symbol there is enacted that one mighty conflict of all the ages ; the war of righteousness against sin. Fierce and prolonged is the struggle ; but as the smoke of battle clears away, the victory is seen to be with the right, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Nor even yet does the vision tarry. We behold the

dawn of the day appointed. The great white throne is there; the dead arise and come to judgment; the solemn awards are given; the heavens are gathered together as a scroll, the earth and the things that are therein are burned up. But, while we look and wonder, there rise from the purging fires new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. The New Jerusalem comes down as a Divine thought from God out of heaven, wonderful in its glory. We gaze on its streets of gold and its gates of pearl, its massive foundations and its marvellous extent, its crystal river and its tree of life. Thus we come to the end, crying, as we close the book,

“Jerusalem the golden,
The joy of the elect!
O dear and future vision,
Which eager hearts expect!
Even here by faith I see thee,
Even now thy walls discern;
To thee my thoughts are kindled,
And strive and pant and yearn.”

To the sublime visions and lofty teachings of this book of the Revelation I purpose to call your attention for some few Sabbath evenings to come. The Lord granting me strength and light, I should count it an unspeakable joy to be enabled to make more plain to you the meaning of a book which is the close and fitting climax of Holy Scripture, on the reading and understanding of which a special blessing is promised, and which is endlessly fascinating, while it is intensely bewildering to many Christian hearts. As I read this book, it is most truly practical. It concerns our nearest dangers and our dearest hopes; it is full of Christ from beginning to end—His power and glory, His faithfulness, His conflict with sin, and His ultimate victory. In a field so vast, in a region of thought where good men have differed so widely, there must be many difficulties in our path. Still I do not doubt that the good Spirit who abides for ever in the Church will grant His blessing to honest, prayerful search. May He enable me in all sobriety of mind, in all prayerfulness and modesty of spirit, to speak to you of the deep things He has here revealed to us in His word.

The interpretations of this book have been very varied and conflicting, but upon their respective merits I cannot of course enter now. Not that I have the dread of controversy some men seem to have, for by the conflict of opinion truth often wins her victories. But it would be quite beside my purpose, and not very conducive to your spiritual good, to point out at every turn where it seems to me that others have failed to seize the mind of the Spirit. My wish is rather to build up, if I may, than to cast down. And, even on this simpler plan, I must leave out much that I feel is needful to completeness, in order to keep within the limits necessity has laid down for me. Yet I may be allowed at the outset a few sentences of general remark on schemes of interpretation other than the one which commends itself to my own mind. Some scholars, and very eminent ones too, believe the greater part of this book of the Revelation found its fulfilment in the overthrow of the Roman empire, and is therefore a thing of the past, save as one judgment of God may contain in itself the germ or prophecy of other judgments in later days. The resurrection, the great assize, and the other visions of the closing chapters are of course assigned to the future; but the central thought of the book they take to be the overthrow of heathen Rome and the destruction of its great world power. This appears to me to be altogether too narrow a view to satisfy the requirements of the case, and it necessitates some conclusions that are altogether untenable. For example, the commencement of the millennium, according to this scheme, was "the Christianization of the Germanic nations after the fall of Rome; and the millennium itself was (to speak roughly) identical with the German empire, which lasted a thousand years."* If this view be correct the millennium is a thing of the past, and we are now in that short space of time during which Satan is loosed again. But it is hard to believe the golden age is over and gone, and that it was to be found in the days when the Inquisition wrought its deeds of blood, when Waldenses and Huguenots perished by thousands for their faith, and when the awful massacre of St. Bartholomew disgraced humanity. This is but one of the many difficulties that

• Hengstenberg.

beset this *Præterist* scheme, as it is called, and prevent me from accepting it.

At the other extreme from this is the *Futurist*, in accordance with which the whole of the book, except the epistles to the seven Churches, has yet to receive its fulfilment in the future. This seems to me to fall by its own weight, and to need no refutation.

Midway between these two, and far more widely received, is the *Historic* or *Continuous* scheme of interpretation. To give it in Luther's words, the mode in which this is carried out is to "put together from the annals of history the past history and troubles of Christendom, and to put them beside the symbols of the Revelation and compare them with the words. Then, wherever these would nicely fit and coincide, there we might depend on obtaining a sure and incontrovertible interpretation." This is not so easy as at first sight seems. We might as soon expect that two men would see the same faces in the fire as the same coincidences between mystical symbols and definite historic facts. Moreover, it proceeds upon the assumption that as we have the whole of Revelation we have also the whole of the world's history wherewith to compare it; whereas some part of that history, and it may be a most important part, is certainly in the unknown future and beyond our ken.

The very numerous writers of this Historic school regard the visions of the Apocalypse as consecutive, and as receiving their fulfilment in chronological order and in definite historic facts. The first six seals, for example, are held to set forth the history of the temporal glory and decline of pagan Rome, the sixth reaching to the adoption of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. The first six trumpets are thought to symbolise the desolation of Christian Rome by the Goths, the Saracens, and the Turks. After the fifth angel had sounded, the star that opened the bottomless pit was Mahomet, the smoke was Mahometanism, and the locusts let loose were the Saracens, who burst in innumerable hordes upon the length and breadth of Europe. The tenth chapter, it is said, points to Luther and the great Reformation, and the two witnesses to faithful men in the eastern and western Churches. The woman in the wilderness represents the apostate Church of Rome. The

first beast from the abyss meant the pope, the second the Jesuits, while the image of the beast pointed to the general councils. Then the first six vials embody the events that occurred after the great European revolution which broke out in 1793. The first received its fulfilment in the French Revolution; the second in the destruction of the naval force and fleets of France by such victories as those of the Nile, Cape St. Vincent, and Trafalgar; the third pointed to the desolation caused by the French wars throughout Europe; the fourth depicts the career of Napoleon I.; the fifth prefigures the humiliation inflicted by that great warrior upon the pope; while the sixth refers to the wasting away of the Turkish power. We are supposed to be living under the seventh vial now, and may almost at any moment expect the second coming and personal reign of our Lord.

Many and weighty are the objections to this scheme, which has found favour so long. Not the least of these is the fact that it is below the spiritual tone of the rest of the New Testament Scriptures. Even in the Old Testament, with the most important exception of the Hebrew people, we have not the history of this nation or that, but the record of the development of great spiritual principles which belong to all nations alike. The doings of Egyptians, Phœnicians, and Assyrians are the subject of history and prophecy, but only so far as those doings affected the course of the development of the kingdom of God in Israel. The history even of the Hebrews themselves has to do with them mainly as a covenant nation, and as the appointed channel of that salvation which in the fulness of time was to be manifested to all the nations. A German scholar has pointed out the significant fact that the sacred writers "have recorded chiefly such points in the life and conduct of the nation, and its more prominent members, as affected advantageously or otherwise the Divine kingdom in Israel. Whatever had no inward connection with this higher aim and peculiar calling of Israel, was, as a rule, passed over altogether, or at all events was only touched upon and mentioned so far as it served to exhibit the attitude of the nation generally, or of its rulers and leaders towards the Lord and His kingdom." If there be, as there assuredly

is, this sparseness of historic detail in reference to Israel, the one chosen, the typical nation, it is most improbable, to say the least, that in the first century there would be given the political history of the different nations of Europe and Asia, and a programme of events, in cypher, many of which appear to have little to do with the kingdom of Christ.

With his characteristic insight and profound penetration into the spirit of the sacred writings, Isaac Taylor spoke words worthy of careful pondering when he said, "Assuredly I am liable to no such overweening delusion as this, that I should sit down with the pages of Isaiah, Daniel, and St. John before me, and should attempt to write the newspapers ten years in advance. This is a folly which has stood in the way hitherto of a warrantable use of the prophetic writings."

The destruction of Jerusalem was the Divine boundary-line of strict historic reference; and, if we go beyond that, we violate the spirit of that Christian dispensation which concerns itself not so much with this or that fact of history, but with those great principles and spiritual laws which underlie and run through all the facts of that human life with which history has to do.

And not only is such a scheme foreign to the genius of the New Covenant, and therefore antecedently improbable, but its practical adoption involves enormous difficulties and uncertainties. We are thrown back on arbitrary dates and fanciful guesses. Great events in national history are passed over in silence, because there can be found for them no fitting place in the scheme; while the most trivial circumstance is spread out into a thing of magnitude, to meet the requirements of the interpreter. And the readjustment of the different parts is endless. Time is constantly enlarging the scroll of history; new events demand a new arrangement of plan; and the last writer overthrows what his predecessor in the same school had laboriously built up. Moreover the whole scheme proceeds upon the assumption that not only definite facts, but definite dates are given. The mystical numbers in the Apocalypse are added to those in the Book of Daniel; an arbitrary starting point is taken; and by a mode of calculation, which is simply ludicrous, the

time when the world shall reach its end is fixed. Again and again the world perversely outlasts the time thus fixed for it. Yet still, again and again, with unabated confidence, other years are named as the time of the end. Against all this we may set the declarations of our Lord Himself. When the disciples asked Him, "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." Speaking of His second coming, He said, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be." If possible, still more decisively He declares, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." In the face of assertions so express as these, the fixing of dates must be abandoned, and with that the whole scheme of historic interpretation.

But we need not at the same time abandon all hope of comprehending this Divine and wonderful book. It seems to me we may take a point of view more accordant with the spiritual character of the New Testament dispensation, and we shall soon trace a marvellous unity and beauty running through the whole. Soul-stirring revelations will rise before us, and there will be given new strength to that faith which is the victory that overcometh the world.

Let us conceive of the Apocalypse as a symbolic representation of the course of Christ's kingdom on the earth. Thereby it is very possible that spiritual conceptions, hopes, dangers, and conflicts may stand out far more vividly than they could be made to do by simple statement. In illustration of my meaning, I may again refer to the visions of the "*Pilgrim's Progress*." Lord Macaulay has truly said that Bunyan's genius was shown by his giving to the abstract the interest of the concrete, while other writers too often did the reverse. When Bunyan would set before us, for example, the many fears and doubts and discouraging apprehensions of the soul under a sense of guilt and without the hope of the gospel, he represents a man floundering through the miry Slough of Despond, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt, and, because of the burden on his back, beginning to sink in that hopeless swamp. He declares the

reality of the Spirit's illumination, not by argument, but by taking the pilgrim through the house of the Interpreter, where he sees things rare and profitable, things pleasant, dreadful, things to make him stable in what he has begun to take in hand. We are not merely told in so many words that if a man will come forth to the Lord's side he must face and fight with difficulties and opposition; but there, outside the Palace Beautiful, are crouching two lions, and we feel as well as see their meaning at once. When he would describe the awfulness of that conflict with the powers of darkness, the reality of which every man has felt who has resolutely striven to be better than he is, Bunyan gives us no mystic introspect, but an outward scene. He presents Christian fighting for dear life, and to the last gasp, with Apollyon, a monster hideous to behold, clothed with scales like a fish, having wings like a dragon and feet like a bear, out of whose belly came fire and smoke, while his mouth was as the mouth of a lion. The awful results to which ignorance leads on one side, and sinful presumption on the other, are graphically portrayed by a valley of the shadow of death, through which there runs a pathway exceeding narrow; on the right hand of which there is a very deep ditch, into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and there both miserably perished; while on the left hand there is a very dangerous quag, into which King David once did fall, and from which he had a very narrow escape only through the good mercy of God. We need no further statement of the worse than utter emptiness of all merely lip knowledge of the Divine life, after we have met with brave Talkative. Nor can there be a more withering exposure of a trimming, middle-steering, worldly policy than the picture of By-ends, of Fair-speech. No mere abstract description of the despondency to which sin surely leads, even in Christian men, could produce anything like the vivid impression conveyed by the vision of that Doubting Castle and Giant Despair, to which By-path meadow leads the pilgrims to their sorrow. These are but a few illustrations out of many, and taken almost on the instant, out of a book which for generations has been laid next to the Bible as the guide both of gentle and simple in the Christian life. Its inexpressible charm and value, for every

cast of mind, seems to me to arise from the fact that Bunyan has, either consciously or unconsciously, followed the Divine model in this book of the Revelation, and has, in symbols that appeal with great power to the imagination, unfolded the deep spiritual truths of the kingdom of God.

At all events, let us seek to read the Divine visions on the principle on which we have read the human to so much advantage. Let us further be very careful to take, as the basis of interpretation, the history and teaching contained in the other books of Scripture; thus finding, within the rest of the sacred writings, the explanation of this the crown and climax of the whole. In this way, I think, we may obtain the golden clue to these wonderful visions, catch joyful glimpses of the coming glory, and enter into the benediction, at the very threshold of the book,—“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy.”

Taking these thoughts with us, let us now turn to the Revelation of St. John the Divine. Already have we seen the beloved disciple overcome with awe at the feet of his glorified Lord, and have seen him lifted up with the right hand of strength. When thus lifted up, there was given to his charge the epistles to the seven Churches of Asia. The whole book was for them also, and to be understood by them; but these epistles were especially theirs. And their exposition ought, as a matter of order, to precede that of the rest of the book. They are fraught with lasting value for the Church of all time, and are richly laden with spiritual truth. But they have more frequently been the basis of public instruction, and are better understood than the rest of the Apocalypse. It would greatly enlarge my scheme to dwell upon them as they deserve; and, though at a sacrifice of symmetry, I must for the present pass by the **FIRST PART** or section, which ends with the third chapter of the book before us. We therefore at once advance to the **SECOND PART**, which begins with the fourth chapter, and introduces us to the heavenly Palace of Vision.

The epistles to the seven Churches having been duly recorded, “After these things,” says the apostle, “I looked, and lo! a door set open in heaven, and the voice, the first which I heard, as of a trumpet speaking to me, said, (that

is the same voice he heard as soon as he began to be in the spirit, he now hears again, saying), Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass after these." Immediately he became in the spirit again, passed into that condition of being in which the revelation of God could most effectually play upon his soul. In a moment he seems to be in a magnificent royal chamber, which he proceeds to describe first of all, before telling us what took place therein. The great central object was the King Eternal seated upon His throne of light. The glory that flashed all around Him was most like to the brilliance of a jasper and sardine stone, bespeaking His unsullied purity and holiness. Around the throne was a rainbow, like in sight to an emerald; the sign that He who sits upon that throne is a covenant-keeping God. When the wickedness of the old world reached its end in the weary desolation of the flood, the Lord set His bow in the clouds, and made it to Noah and his sons the symbol of mercy mingling with judgment, and of faithfulness to promise which should never fail. The splendour of the throne was softened by this beautiful veil cast over it, this veil of emerald green which may be looked upon when no human eye can penetrate the glorious light which is all around; even as the heart can evermore rest on the truth that His is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, when all beside is inscrutable and unknown.

Round about this central throne were four-and-twenty lesser thrones, as for the highest officers of state; and on these were seated four-and-twenty elders. These are the representatives of the spiritual Israel, the true priests. They are twenty-four in number, either as representing both the Old and New Testament Churches, the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles; or, as is more probable, this is their number, because David divided the priests of Israel, the sons of Levi, into twenty-four courses. These elders are thus suggestive of the entire Levitical priesthood, and thus of the whole people of Israel whom that priesthood represented. They are clothed in white raiment, to show the moral purity of the priests, and they wear crowns of gold; for all the Lord's people are both kings and priests. Having derived their royalty from the King

of kings, the elders wear their crowns in His presence. Before the throne were seven lamps of fire burning. Tongues of flame represented the descending Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and these seven lamps indicate the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost, His wide-spread influence and convincing power. He went forth and brooded over the dark depths of the waters at first, and brought forth life, order, and beauty. He garnished the heavens. He is the Creator of natural life everywhere; on mountain height and in ocean depth, in waving meadows and tangled hedgerow, in rippling stream and leafy woodland; but, more than all, He is the Creator of spiritual life in the souls of men. He convinces of sin; He leads to Christ; He renews after the image of Christ. He is the source of all spiritual grace; and His ever active, ever enlightening power is fitly symbolised by the seven lamps burning before the throne. Out of the throne, before which these lamps are burning, proceed lightnings, and voices, and thunders. These suggest to us those manifold and wondrous agencies by which God executes His will. All things animate and inanimate are made to serve His mighty purposes. Some consciously, others unconsciously, and some even unwillingly, fulfil His infinite counsels. He makes even the wrath of men to praise Him. Wind and storm, lightning and thunder are His messengers; and He will execute all His purposes.

We look again, and beneath the throne and far around it there was as it were a sea of glass like crystal. Representation this of the unfathomable depths of the Divine nature—depths where all our thoughts are drowned. Representation, too, of that unsullied purity which marks every act of Him who is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.

We come now to another symbol of great importance to the completeness of the scene. It is thus described:—

“In front of the throne and round the throne
Were four creatures, full of eyes before and behind.
And the first creature was like a lion;
And the second creature was like a heifer;
And the third creature had the face of a man;
And the fourth creature was like an eagle flying.
And the four creatures had each of them six wings;
Within and without they were full of eyes:

And they cease not day and night, saying,
 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God the Almighty,
 Who was, and who is, and who will be.'

Man is the noblest creature of God on earth, and has dominion over the rest. Yet, though by his intellectual and spiritual powers he surpasses the other creatures, there are those among them that in some respects surpass him. The lion is his superior in strength, and the eagle in power of flight. The Jews had a saying to this effect: "*Four are the highest in the world: the lion among wild beasts, the ox among tame cattle, the eagle among birds, man among all creatures.*" Keeping in the spirit of this saying, let us try to conceive of a being the noblest that could live on the earth. We will leave out of consideration its form, and simply suggest the qualities it would possess. There would be a man's power of mind and affection, and a lion's majesty, strength, and dauntless energy; added to these there would be the patient power and productive energy of the ox, the most useful animal on the farm of the ancient Jew, that ploughed and harrowed his land, and trod out his corn; finally there would be the eagle's power of flight, as it soars aloft and looks on the sun with undazzled eye. This ideal being would be as a man in thought and feeling, as a lion in majesty and strength, as an ox in patient labour and productive power, and as an eagle in lofty flight and motion. He would combine the highest qualities possible in an earthly being, and we can readily see that a perfect manhood might be symbolised in this chapter by these four creatures together.

The symbol here employed is found again and again in the Old Testament Scriptures. When on an evil day man was banished from paradise, we read, "So He drove out the man, and placed at the east of the garden of Eden *cherubim*, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." The cherubim were the same with the living creatures before us. The flaming sword was the symbol of God's righteous anger against sin, and the token of the fact that paradise was not by man to be entered again until the Son of man had re-opened the way in righteousness. The cherubim were there, not to keep man out of Eden, the flaming sword did that; but, as the symbol of

a pure and perfected manhood, they are represented as taking possession of that paradise in man's name, until in Christ it should be by man regained. In after years the figures of the cherubim were embroidered in gold on the hangings of the tabernacle and temple, and on the separating vail of blue, purple, crimson, and white, which hung before the holiest. They were also, in carved form, represented as bending over that mercy-seat of gold on which the glory of God rested in the most sacred place. They were there as a beacon of hope and promise, assuring us that man was not for ever cast off from God as the angels were, but that one day, when perfected in Christ, he should again stand in that presence and live. Then the symbol reappears in the visions of Ezekiel (i. 5-14), "Out of the midst of the cloud came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side: they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces, and their wings were stretched upward: two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the Spirit was to go they went; and they turned not as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals, and like the appearance of lamps; it [that is the flashing flame] went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning."

Reading these passages from Ezekiel's prophecies, and reverting to the other occurrences of the cherubim in Scripture, there can be no question that in the living creatures seen by John we have the repetition of a symbol a long time before consecrated to the service of truth. The form of the cherubim is of course strange to us, and almost inconceivable; but it is not upon the form so much as upon the lofty powers and the perfect glory of manhood thereby symbolised, that we are to fix our thoughts. "It

doth not yet appear what we shall be," but glorious indeed shall be the ultimate destiny of redeemed souls. Multi-form developments of varied power and excellence shall be found in the perfected man. Heaven will not be complete without him, and the cherubim are in the vision to declare it in symbol before it is accomplished in fact.

Returning once more to the chapter before us, it is said that these living creatures were full of eyes without and within; that is, they were full of that spiritual life which comes from God,—the token of life being the flashing eye. The abundance of that life is further indicated by the fact that they rest not day nor night.

“ And when the creatures give glory and honour and thanks
To Him who is seated on the throne,
To Him who liveth for ever and ever,
The four-and-twenty elders fall down
Before Him who is seated on the throne,
And worship Him who liveth for ever and ever.
And they cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
Thou art worthy, O Lord our God,
To receive the glory and the honour and the power;
Because Thou didst make all things,
And for Thy purpose they are and were made.”

Such is the opening scene of glory in that splendid audience chamber of the King of kings, into which the apostle John was permitted to gaze. All this description, I repeat, was but preparatory. Here, in this stately palace, the Eternal is about to unfold those visions of the future of His Church in which we are all interested, and to which, in subsequent lectures, I must call your thoughts, if we are spared. What shall be there unfolded will be the source of unfailing consolation to those who wait and watch for their Lord. We shall see that, for a time, darkness and conflict must be the heritage of those who follow their Saviour. The servant is not above his Master, nor the disciple above his Lord. In our measure we must drink of the cup of which He drank, and be baptized with the baptism wherewith He was baptized. This is part of the eternal counsel, and we are not to start back as though some strange thing had happened to us when it comes. Yet this chequered condition is but for a while. He that shall

come, will come, and will not tarry. The Divinely kindled hopes of every Christian heart shall surely be fulfilled. Not always shall sadness darken our sunshine. Not always shall this body of sin and death baffle our loftier aspirations, and keep us where we would not be.

“ A few more suns shall set
O'er these dark hills of time,
And we shall be where suns are not—
A far serener clime.

A few more storms shall beat
On this wild rocky shore,
And we shall be where tempests cease,
And surges swell no more.

'Tis but a little while,
And He shall come again
Who died that we might live, who lives
That we with Him may reign.

Then, O my Lord, prepare
My soul for that glad day ;
Oh wash me in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away ! ”

II.

THE SEVEN SEALS.

REVELATION v.-viii. 1.

THUS far we have merely looked upon the splendour of the heavenly palace, and are now awaiting further disclosures.

The rapturous burst of praise recorded in the previous chapter having passed away, the apostle saw in the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne a book, or scroll of parchment. Like Ezekiel's roll, it was written within and without, for the Divine purpose admits of no addition, and it was sealed with seven seals as containing the secret things of the Lord. While John was musing on this scroll and its meaning, his attention was called to a mighty angel who stood forth and with strong voice uttered the cry, "Who is worthy to open the roll and to loose the seals of it?" To this universal challenge, rejoinder there was none. Not one of all the creatures of God gave back reply. "No man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." For that book is the scroll of the future; and the future no man knows, save as God unfolds it. The morning comes, but no man has strength to uplift the curtain that separates the rest of the day from his view. We stand in the mysterious present, and turn our faces wistfully towards that which is rising out of the abyss of the future; but no eye of flesh is keen enough to pierce the darkness. No man was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. Because of this the beloved disciple tells us he wept much. And these words, it has been well said, can only be understood by those who have lived in great catastrophes of the Church and entered with the fullest

sympathy into her sufferings. Without tears the Revelation was not written, neither can it without tears be understood. The apostle was comforted however by an assurance given to him by one of the elders, that though no created being could know the times and seasons, could solve the mysterious future, yet One mightier than the sons of men—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Christ Himself—had conquered so as to open the book and to loose its seven seals. Instantly One came forth out of the glory of the throne, and stood in the midst of the circle. He was like a Lamb that had been slain. We know who was meant by that. A Lamb for gentleness and purity, a Lamb as a sacrificial victim for lost men, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Yet was He the lion as well as the lamb—a lion in kingly majesty and strength, the very Prince of David's line, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. We must look at both, the gentleness and the strength, the sacrificial offering and the kingly power. As a Lamb He had seven horns to indicate His universal dominion, for the horn is ever in Scripture the symbol of strength and rule; and He had seven eyes, for the penetrating life of the Spirit was given without measure to Christ. Our Lord, thus symbolised as the Lamb of God and Judah's Lion, came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. Then it was that there burst forth a magnificent strain of adoration of the Son, even as there had been of the Father; for God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. When He took the book, the four living creatures and the four-and-twenty elders fell down before the Lamb. They had each of them both a harp and a golden vial—the harp betokening praise, and the vial sending forth perfumes or prayers. They have the harp because they have the vial; they praise because they pray. There is no praise without prayer, and there ought to be no prayer without praise to crown it. Both with harp and vial, the four creatures and the four-and-twenty elders fell down

before the Lamb, as He took the scroll into His hand, and they sang a new song, saying,—

“Thou art worthy to receive the scroll
And to open the seals thereof.
For Thou wast slain, and didst redeem to God by Thy blood,
From every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,
And madest them a kingdom and priests,
And they have dominion upon the earth.”

Higher and higher rose this new, this rapturous song of worshipping praise and love. As soon as the voices of the living ones and the elders had ceased, lo! the strain was taken up by multitudes of angels hovering o’er the throne. The stately roof was hidden, and the surrounding expanse peopled, by angel-forms clustering there. The number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. They knew nothing by experience of redeeming love, for they had never fallen; but they were deeply interested spectators, and their hearts beat with holy sympathy and joy as they too caught up the song, saying with a loud voice,—

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
To receive the power, and riches, and wisdom,
And strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

And now the grand ascription which the cherubim and the elders had passed on to the myriad multitude of the angels was caught up by a still wider circle as it fell from them. Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them joined their chorus to the angels’ song, saying,—

“Unto Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb,
The blessing, and honour, and glory, and strength
Be for ever and ever.”

Thus the wide compass of creation was filled with the Redeemer’s praise, and then the refrain which had been passed on from the cherubim and the elders to the angels, and from the angels to the uttermost bounds of the universe, came back to the centre from which the waves of song first flowed. “And the four creatures said, Amen. And the four-and-twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever.”

Thus this magnificent responsive hymn of adoration sank to stillness, and a hush of expectation pervades the scene. The Lord Jesus had taken to Himself His kingly power on the ground of His perfect and accepted sacrifice, and He was now about to administer in part the government of His Church and to send forth judgments against His enemies. He proceeded to open the seals and to declare the mystery. As the first seal was loosing, one of the four creatures cried as with a voice of thunder—Come! * With silent wonder and awe John beheld a white horse obeying the call, and coming forth with stately step. In the rider's hand was that weapon of war, the bow; and then and there, while all looked on, there was given to him a crown, and he went forth conquering and that he might conquer. Here we have the symbol of Victory—conquest over enemies. What enemies are specially meant, and in what way the triumph shall be won, cannot be known by us till the various parts of the vision have passed in review. Thus far we have simply the idea of victory.

Then was the second seal opened, and the second creature cried as did the first—Come! And there went out another horse, that was red. And he that sat thereon rode into the midst of the group. Power was given him to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another; in token whereof there was put into his hand a great sword. Thus have we the unmistakable symbol of War added to that of victory. Victory by means of war is the idea as thus enlarged before us.

The third seal was then broken, and the third creature cried aloud—Come! In obedience to this summons there appeared a black horse, whose rider held in his hand a pair of balances. Here was Famine stalking forth, black Famine, during the prevalence of which such should be the scarcity of food that it would be needful to weigh out rigorously to each one his portion. There is light thrown upon the symbol by that passage in Ezekiel where God said to the prophet, "Son of man, behold I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread *by weight* and with care: and they shall drink water *by measure* and with astonishment." As this gloomy shape of dread appeared, a

* Not "Come and see," as in the English version.

voice from the midst of the four creatures cried—"A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny, and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." The Roman denarius, unfortunately translated by our English word penny, was an ordinary labourer's day wages, a choenix, or measure of wheat, was the quantity usually allotted as sufficient food for one man. Therefore the meaning of this cry was, that a time of scarcity should come when a man's wages would only be sufficient to obtain food for one person, while upon those wages a whole household might depend. A man's labour should suffice only for himself, and only for one even of his wants, his food. The famine would strike the articles of commonest necessity. The luxuries, the wine and oil, were not to be hurt, but the products on which human life most urgently depended were to be distressingly scarce. The opening of the third seal betokens that the war which should issue in victory would be attended by straits of famine.

Then at length was the fourth seal opened, while the fourth creature cried, as did the other three—Come! And there came a pale horse, with wan Death sitting thereon; while a weird shape, the personification of Hades, or the grave, followed after. To this dread being "power was given to take away the life of a fourth part of the people, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." The war that should lead to victory, and be attended with famine, would be fatal to multitudes, who should perish and lie in heaps in their nameless graves.

And for what cause should all this desolation come? What great sin had provoked vengeance so dire? The opening of the fifth seal supplies the answer. The apostle goes on to say, "When He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be

killed as they were, should be fulfilled." All this reminds me strongly of what I have read before. The finger points more and more steadily to the destruction of the city and nationality of that people to whom Jesus said (Matt. xxiii. 34—38), "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" When the seals were opened one by one, more and more clearly we seem to see the outlines of those judgments that were coming upon that rebellious house of Israel, who had cast out their Saviour and dyed their hands with the blood of His followers. Nor is this mere conjecture. For consider: this book of the Revelation is wholly concerned with the Church of Christ, her enemies, her conflicts, her victory, and final glory. Upon one of her enemies it is clear the outpouring of judgment is betokened in the vision before us. And it is probable, to say the least, that the first enemy thus dealt with would be the first enemy with which the Church comes into conflict. Most assuredly that first enemy was the Jewish nation, which had crucified the Lord and was filled with bitterness against all who bore the name of the Nazarene. A merely casual glance through the book of the Acts of the Apostles will serve to show how intense was the hatred of perverted Judaism to Christianity. Our Lord had not long left His disciples, before the Jewish rulers thrust Peter and John into prison, after they had healed the lame man at the temple gate. Other tokens of Divine power were manifested, and again the high-priest rose up and all that were with him, and were filled with indignation, and put them in the common prison. Remember also what a fierce spirit

burst forth when Stephen was murdered, calling on God as he fell; and how the fires of persecution, thus kindled, blazed against the whole Church. The multitude of the disciples had to flee from the city for their lives. Nor even in strange cities had they rest. Letters of authority from the high-priest were given to ardent persecutors, who went forth to places far and near, haling men and women and casting them into prison. In the madness of their hate they even compelled the more timorous to blaspheme that holy name by which they were called. Herod stretched forth his hands to vex the Church, and slew James with the sword. With the Jews this stroke of tyranny gained him great popularity, and, still further to please them, he seized upon Peter and thrust him into prison. When Saul converted became Paul the preacher, and set forth on his great missionary work, almost everywhere he met with desperate resistance from the Jews. At Antioch in Pisidia, they stood up in the synagogue contradicting and blaspheming, and at length roused such a spirit against Paul and Barnabas as to expel them out of their coast. At the very next town to which these apostles came, Iconium, the same thing was repeated. A fierce assault was made, and they had a narrow escape from being stoned to death. The persecutors followed them to Lystra, and so excited the populace there that they actually did stone Paul, and he was taken up for dead. At Thessalonica again they surrounded the house of Jason, who had received the apostles to be his guests, and such was their violence that Paul and Silas had to be sent away by night. Again they followed them to Berea, and again compelled them to flee. I need not further dwell upon the manner in which a furious multitude rushed upon Paul in the temple, their murderous purpose being only frustrated by the chief captain and imperial troops who came to the rescue from the fortress of Antonia close by; nor can I do more than refer to the forty assassins who bound themselves by solemn oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And these were only a few instances out of many. The cases of the Christian men who suffered loss, punishment, or death either at the hands of the Jews themselves, or by those Romans whom the Jews perpetually instigated

against them, were almost innumerable, and were to be found in nearly every city between Jerusalem and Rome. Now, recalling these facts and remembering that the judgments here described in vision were shown, at the opening of the fifth seal, to come at the cry of the martyrs whose souls are represented as taking refuge under God's altar; and remembering also that our Lord Himself had expressly declared that upon the Jewish people, yea upon that generation, should come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, their house being left unto them desolate;—I feel impelled to the conclusion that in the vision of the seven seals we have a representation of the breaking of the Jewish power, which the overthrow of Jerusalem brought about. Then was there a victory gained over the bitter enemies of the truth—a victory which was accomplished by means of war, attended by sore straits of famine, followed by the death of multitudes. The red horse of War pawed the ground when the legions of Titus encamped round the walls of Jerusalem. Upon his black horse Famine rode forth, when within those walls men and women, degraded by hunger to the level of beasts, fought with each other, and even with their own children, for a morsel of bread. And as in the sore straits of that awful siege the people perished by thousands, well might it be said that Death on a pale horse rode through the land, and the Grave followed after.

To confirm the impression that the vision of the seven seals has especially to do with the Jewish nation, there is the fact that the allusions throughout are intensely Jewish. For example the scenery of the vision, in some things, recalls the temple to our minds. There is the glory, the cherubim, the burning lamps, and the four-and-twenty elders, suggestive of the four-and-twenty courses into which the sons of Aaron were divided in their priestly work. Jesus is here set forth as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Lamb that had been slain. In the next chapter, the seventh, which forms part of this same vision, we find the twelve tribes mentioned by name, a certain number out of each tribe being sealed for deliverance. Nor must it be overlooked that our Lord, on His way to crucifixion, declared that the very exclamation of this six-

teenth verse should be wrung from the miserable dwellers in the city at Jerusalem's overthrow. "Daughters of Jerusalem," said He, turning to the weeping women that followed, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming in the which . . . they shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us: and to the hills, Cover us." Taking all these points together, there is very much to confirm us in our views of the vision before us.

And if the interpretations thus far be well-founded, we shall not have much difficulty in arriving at the meaning of the sixth seal, which was opened immediately after John had seen the souls of the martyrs, and heard their cry from beneath the altar. "And I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair; and the moon all became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig-tree casts its winter figs when shaken by a strong wind; and the heaven passed away, as a scroll rolled up; and every hill and island from their places were moved. And the kings of the land, and the nobles and the chieftains, and the rich and the mighty, and every one, bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the hills. And they say to the hills and to the rocks, "Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him who sits upon the throne, and from the vengeance of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand?" "The soul-stirring and magnificent imagery of these verses must be interpreted as we seek to interpret the whole book. We must turn to Scripture itself, and try to find the meaning there. These symbols have often been used before, and they have a recognised meaning. The heavenly bodies are significant of the rulers of nations, and the description of the darkening of the sun and the moon, and the falling of the stars, is not to be taken literally, but as a highly wrought form of imagery, depicting the overthrow of national governments and the powers that wield them. Let us take an instance from the Old Testament, where this meaning is perfectly obvious. Clearly it is not an actual darkening of the heavenly bodies, but a national overthrow, of which Isaiah thus speaks in the thirteenth chapter of

his prophecy. "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, did see. Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine . . . I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place . . . And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in, from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there." More that is confirmatory might have been given; but we cannot have a moment's doubt, as we read all this, that the prophet was describing the overthrow of a nation, when he spoke of falling stars and constellations, of darkening sun and withdrawing moon. Treading upon ground so sure therefore, we may safely interpret the symbols seen by John, at the opening of the sixth seal, to mean that a great nation is to be utterly broken up, and its rulers cast down. We may do this all the more safely, because Christ Himself, when foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, makes use of the very symbols here employed. It is true the magnificence of the imagery may shadow forth a still greater day than that of Jerusalem's doom—the day of final judgment. In our Lord's words, the one event seems to melt away into the other. The language is not exhausted by one application. There is a nearer event and a more remote, and the two are inseparably intertwined. He tells of a near end, for the individual and the generation; He tells, also, of a far end, which shall surely come for time itself, and for the world. Each separate downfall of evil becomes a prophecy of the next and of the last; and the destruction of Jerusalem becomes in itself a new warrant for the Church's expectation of the second advent, and of the day of judgment. But now we are only concerned to know that the primary reference of our Saviour's words, in St. Matthew's gospel, was to the overthrow of that Jewish nation which had fallen from its spiritual glory;

which, having become a dead and corrupt thing, displayed only malignity against the kingdom of Christ. And, also, that the symbols John witnessed at the opening of the sixth seal bear the same meaning and reference.

It does not fall within my purpose to show how completely this vision was fulfilled. Within two or three years after John had beheld, in vision, the opening of the seven seals, the judgment hastened to its accomplishment.* The scenes of conflict were at first in the distance. The waters of the Galilean lake were reddened with human blood. Almost every northern town and village had its dreadful story of disaster to tell. There were wars and rumours of wars on every side, and then the fated stream of woe flowed on to the chosen city itself. The three famous Roman legions—the fifth, the tenth, and the fifteenth—under the command of Titus, encamped round the city, and brought its day of doom. Strife was within the walls, and the enemy without. Already have we seen how the red horse of war went first, the black horse of famine next, and both followed by grim death and the grave. Valour the most desperate could not avert the overthrow. By one successful attack after another, the foe came nearer and nearer. Wall after wall crumbled to ruins before them, till at length, on the never-to-be-forgotten tenth of August, in the seventieth year of our Lord, the devouring flames, kindled by a soldier's torch, sent up their glare to heaven from the temple itself. Then, when that sacred place was utterly blotted out, not one stone left upon another, when the last sacrifice had been offered there, when the remnant of the people—crushed and spirit-broken—were sold into slavery, or to be butchered in gladiatorial shows, when their nationality was utterly trodden out, and their land given to strangers, it seemed as if the historian could only fitly describe this great national catastrophe by such imagery as this before us: "Lo! there was a great earthquake: the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. The stars of heaven fell upon the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as

* On the important question of the date of the Revelation, see the Preface.

a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places."

But for a moment stay. Through that awful thunder-cloud of vengeance there are streaming rays of heavenly light. The Lord knoweth them that are His; and before the desolation comes in all its fierceness, He will take care of His own who are faithful to Him. The destroying angel swept through the land of Egypt, but he invaded not the homes of Israel, came not within the doors whose posts and lintel were sprinkled with blood. And when, in later times, the doom of sin came upon the chosen race for their idolatry, Ezekiel had this vision: "Behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and *set a mark upon the foreheads* of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the other He said in my hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; but *come not near any man upon whom is the mark.*" All this will prepare us to understand the striking scene which John now beheld between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. Four angels were seen standing at the four corners of the earth, holding fast the four winds of the earth, that the wind might not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. In other words, they are represented as keeping back the storm until the safety of all believing souls is secured. While these four angels thus hold in check the coming tribulation for a while, John saw another angel going up from the east, ascending from that point in the heavens whence the dayspring comes, and he had in his hand the seal of the living God. As he rose up, he cried with a loud voice to the four angels who were to be the executioners of vengeance, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, and this was his cry, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." Then John, if he did not witness the mystic sealing, heard the number of them that were thus sealed. A hundred and forty and

four thousand received the token of safety, twelve thousand out of every tribe of Israel. We are not, of course, to take these numbers literally. The number twelve belongs to both dispensations,—the old and the new. There were twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve apostles of the Lamb. The number sealed is the number twelve multiplied by itself first, and then by thousands. It thus simply denotes that a large multitude, having completeness, and all known to God, were saved from the coming woe. When our Lord foretold Jerusalem's overthrow, He gave clear directions to His disciples, by following which they might secure their personal safety. The Christians, thus forewarned of the approaching storm, made good their escape to the cities east of the Jordan, and especially to the city of Pella, where they dwelt in comparative security till the storm was overpast, and more peaceful times returned.

Now you will not have failed to mark that in the closing verses of the sixth chapter, the paralysing fear of those who fell with the downfall of Jerusalem darkens and deepens till it suggests the anguish of the lost at their dread account. In terror shrinking, they call to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" In like manner, on the other hand, the multitude of the Christians who were sealed and saved at the destruction of the city seems to suggest and to melt away into the greater multitude of all the saved, gathered from every land and age. With a ravishing picture of their final blessedness in our Father's house, the curtain falls: "And after this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and bearing palm-branches in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever

and ever." Then the silent wonder rose in the apostle's heart, and one from among the elders answered, the inward thought by uttering for him the unspoken question, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I said unto him, My Lord, thou knowest: I know not, tell me. And he said to me, These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him by day and by night in His temple, and He that sitteth upon the throne shall tabernacle among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, nor shall the sun fall upon them, nor any heat; because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne tends them, and leads them to life-springs of water, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." This bright vision of heavenly compensation for earthly sorrow needs no comment from me. One feels that comment would almost mar its rare beauty, and rob it of that lustre which times untold has brought back light to eyes that were dimmed with tears. Muse on every line for yourselves.

The seventh seal is still unbroken; and this fact may be overlooked by us, through the unfortunate arrangement which places the account of its opening at the beginning of the eighth chapter instead of at the close of the seventh. That opening is too solemn and impressive to be omitted here. "And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven as it were for the space of half an hour." In that royal chamber where on the uplifted throne was the King Eternal, in the midst thereof the Lamb that had been slain, and round about the elders and the living creatures and the myriad multitude of the angels, there was a solemn silence. All were wrapt in mute awe. Full half an hour went slowly on, and the tide of revelation was arrested. No further visions came to view. It was not the pause that comes from listlessness, but it was as when men in the presence of some dread fact or mystery look into each other's faces and dare not speak—dare not speak, for the whole being is quivering with emotion. Heaven, all heaven, seems to stand in awe at the unveiling of the judgments that should come upon that once highly favoured

nation of Israel. That silence, so still yet so eloquent, seems to betoken that now the great preparatory dispensation of Judaism has reached its end. The old and decayed kingdom has vanished away, giving place to a spiritual realm which cannot be shaken, and of which Judaism was but the type and shadow; an urdying kingdom not for one nation only, but for all the nations. It was the silence of reverence. The mysterious ways of Him who is wonderful in counsel and mighty in working had been unfolded. It was the silence of awe. Jerusalem was overthrown. In vision they had seen it all. The city of the great King, on which the light of heaven once shone so steadily, in the midst of which prophet after prophet from God had in His name stood and pleaded with His people, where even the Messiah Himself had appeared, speaking as never man spake—that world-renowned, that heaven-favoured city—had reached its doom. It was not heathen Babylon, or idolatrous Tyre and Sidon, that had fallen with a fall so fearful. It was Jerusalem, and there was silence; the silence of awe and amazement at the sight. May it not foreshadow the feeling with which we are to regard the doom of those who have had gospel privileges and abused them, to whom God has spoken, but their ears were stopped; on whom His light shone clearly, but they closed their eyes and walked in darkness? Alas! what a spectacle rises before us—a lost soul—a soul self-ruined—a soul that might have been saved and would not. At such a sight there may well be silence in heaven.

“‘And who art thou that mournest me?’

Jerusalem may say,

‘And fear’st not rather that thyself

May prove a castaway?

I am a dried and abject branch;

My place is given to thee:

But woe to every barren graft

Of thy wild olive-tree!

‘Our day of grace is sunk in night,

Our time of mercy spent;

For heavy was my children’s crime,

And strange their punishment:

Yet gaze not idly on our fall,
But, sinner, warnèd be ;
Who sparèd not His chosen seed,
May send His wrath on thee !

'Our day of grace is sunk in night,
Thy noon is in its prime ;
Oh, turn and seek thy Saviour's face
In this accepted time.
So, Gentile, may Jerusalem
A lesson prove to thee,
And in the New Jerusalem
Thy home for ever be.' "

III.

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS.

REVELATION viii. 2-xi.

THE vision of the seven seals reached its end in the previous chapter. It closed in such a way as to show us that while it is a connected part of the whole book, it is yet complete in itself; it stretches away to the end of all earthly things. We hear the cry of dismay from the lost, and look upon the blessedness of the saved. A deep pause and solemn silence intervene between that vision and the one that follows. We are not to suppose therefore that there is any chronological sequence between them. Each separate vision, as we shall see, reaches on to the time of the end. The lines of thought are parallel rather than consecutive. In each new vision we enter upon a new subject, and see the unfolding of God's judgments upon enemies of another kind than those with which we have hitherto had to deal.

The silent awe which filled the chamber of vision at the opening of the seventh seal seemed to the apostle to last for half an hour, and then preparations were made for a further revelation. We here enter upon a new section. The vision of the seven trumpets forms the **THIRD PART** of the book before us, and extends from the second verse of the eighth chapter to the close of the eleventh. We have already seen the overthrow of apostate Judaism. But this was not the only enemy with which the Church had to enter into conflict. There were other foes ahead, and it seems natural to expect that they too would be shown in vision, and most likely in the order in which they would arise in fact. If so, the next vision will have to do with heathenism. Beyond the Jewish people, this was the dark

shape that brooded over all the world; and beneath its awful shadow every nation crouched in degradation. Already, as a preacher of the Cross, John had dwelt in Ephesus, and there was one of the proudest monuments of idolatry. In stately magnificence the temple of Diana glittered in the sun. The making of little silver shrines of the goddess, to be sold to worshippers from far and near, created great wealth for Demetrius and the fellow-craftsmen of his powerful guild. At Lystra, where they healed the lame man, Paul and Barnabas were taken for Jupiter and Mercury. At Athens Paul's spirit was stirred within him; for that proud, intellectual city was full of idols, temples and altars and images were to be seen at every turn. Still further westward, the same thing was true of Rome. Wherever we look, the darkness of heathenism covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. At that very hour India and China were under the curse of the superstitions there prevailing unto this day. Our Saxon forefathers were worshipping Thor and Wodin in the northern forests. Africa was under the desolation of idolatry, and so were the islands of the Southern Sea. There can be no question that, when the Christian faith had gone beyond the Jewish persecution, its one great work was to storm the citadel of heathenism and to plant the standard of Emmanuel on the towers of this fortress of darkness. It is probable, therefore, to say the least, that to this great enemy the next vision after that of the seven seals will significantly point.

If we turn to the vision itself this probability becomes something like certainty. We shall see presently that the eighth and ninth chapters describe certain plagues that are the judgments of God on the men with whom the vision has to do. The twentieth verse of the ninth chapter is tolerably decisive as to who these men are. Let us turn and read: "And the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not *worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.*" This plainly points to heathenism as the enemy against which the judgments of God had been unfolded in vision. If any confirmation of this were needed, it is found in the fifteenth verse of the

eleventh chapter ; for, as I have said, this vision goes on to the end of that chapter. It is there said that when the last of the seven trumpets is blown, "when the seventh angel sounded there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever." It is plain that the vision described in these four chapters has been in process of fulfilment ever since Christianity attacked the heathenism of the Roman empire and shook it from the throne of the Cæsars. It is in process of fulfilment now in these days of missionary enterprise. It will be completely fulfilled when the idols are utterly abolished, when heathen temples are all levelled to the earth, when all the dark forms of superstition have vanished, and Christ has seen of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

If what I have advanced thus far seem reasonable, let me ask you to turn now to the second verse of the eighth chapter, where the vision of the seven trumpets begins.

The apostle still stood in that royal chamber in which the opening of the seven seals took place. When the lengthened silence that followed that opening had come to an end, another spectacle of deepest interest awaits his attention. He saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God ; for it is not merely the seven angels who at that time stood in the presence of God. There is dignity and gradation of rank implied. When Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the temple, he said, "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God." The seven angels who stand in the presence of God are to be distinguished therefore among the many angels round about the throne, whose number we have been told is myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. To these seven angels were given seven trumpets, the significance of which a moment's reflection will show. To Israel of old Jericho was the typical heathen city of the Canaanites. It was the first city which opposed them after their passage of the Jordan. Surrounded by high walls, guarded, and full of armed men, this accursed city of the plain may well be suggestive of that grim fortress of idolatry which is to be stormed and taken by the spiritual Israel. Yet the shattering of those lofty walls was not the

work of man but of God, and you will remember at once how that work was accomplished. The city was compassed for six days, and on the seventh was compassed seven times. Before the ark, seven priests bore seven trumpets of rams' horns. Seven times the trumpets sounded; and at the seventh blast the people shouted and the walls fell down flat, so that the warriors went up into the city, every man straight before him; and they took the city. The symbol of this vision recalls that ancient story, and therein gives us presage of a more glorious triumph over a more deadly foe.

While the seven angels were preparing to sound, there was an introductory scene we must not omit.

Another angel came and stood near the altar, having a golden censer. As he stood there, there was given to him much incense, that he might give it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar, which was before the throne. And this sweet-smelling incense went up out of the hand of the angel, along with the prayers of the saints, into the presence of God. As prayer and incense go up together, the great truth lives before us that prayer, the effectual fervent prayer of the saints, availeth much in the carrying out of God's great purposes in the heathen world. We learn, too, that prayer is thus made availing by being mingled in the golden censer with the much incense of merits that are not ours, but His who died for us. We, who cannot ourselves go forth to the heathen, must remember this scene. In the overthrow of the false, and the establishment of the true, prayer is seen to be a mighty spiritual force. The trumpets were not sounded till the prayers and the incense had gone up before God.

And now the angel took the censer again, and filled it from the fire of the altar, and cast the contents thereof upon the earth; and there arose thunderings, and lightnings, and voices of an earthquake. The prayer of faith has gone up, and the answer of fire now comes down; and the Divinely appointed agencies, signified again by thunders, lightnings, and voices, begin to do their work. Then, after this preparatory scene, the seven angels raised their trumpets, and stood ready to sound the blast.

"And the first sounded; and there followed hail and fire mingled in blood, and it was cast upon the earth; and the

third part of the earth was burned up, and the third part of the trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up." By this I understand that heathenism has acted like a blight upon the very fruits of the earth. Nor is it difficult to see how idolatry has degraded men; and over vast regions of territory, having rich and fertile soil, they have been content to live in the poorest fashion from hand to mouth. Our modern books of travel describe to us lands capable of almost boundless production; but, being left in wild uncultivation, they are nearly valueless. The dwellers on the soil take what it spontaneously gives, with small endeavour after more. Debased and narrow-minded, they live precariously by the chase and on wild fruits, while harvests of richest produce are within their reach. It is among Christian nations that agriculture has received its wonderful impetus, and the earth has been made to yield its riches for the benefit of man. In some parts of heathendom, it is true, the land has been under tillage; yet it is also true that, taking heathendom as a whole, it seems as if hail and fire mingled in blood had been cast upon the earth, and a third part of the trees burnt up, and all green grass consumed.

"And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures that were in the sea and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed." If the fruits of the earth have received check and blight from heathenism, so also, we are here taught, have the maritime interests of nations. With the exception of the ancient Phœnicians, no heathen people has been really a great maritime power. Idolatry debases manhood, and cripples enterprise. As in the case of China and Japan, it makes a people narrow, jealous, and exclusive, shutting them up within their own territories. The ocean, as the great international highway, is fully appreciated only by the peoples that are enlightened and free. The vessels that plough the deep, binding distant lands together, bear on the mast-head the flags of the Christian nations of the north and west. The Nile was rendered useless to Egypt by being turned into blood, and the idea of destruction

was conveyed to the prophet Jeremiah under the figure of a burning mountain; and therefore these symbols are reproduced as the second angel blew his blast.

"And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning like a torch; and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the springs of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third part of the waters became as wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter." In other words, the social and civil life of nations has been poisoned and painfully embittered by idolatry. Civil wars and intestine strife and discord have been its miserable fruit. That we are warranted in thus explaining these verses is plain, I think, from the fact that rivers and fountains have, in this book, the meaning of states and nations. For example: in the first verse of the seventeenth chapter, the great harlot is represented as "sitting upon many waters;" and the fifteenth verse of the same chapter explains it thus—"The waters which thou sawest where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." So that when the star Wormwood fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters, we have the symbol of those cruel internecine wars that everywhere have followed grimly in the train of heathenism. Need I remind you of the long and desolating conflicts of opposing dynasties in China, in these our days, or of the battles between tribe and tribe in the heart of Africa, and in the islands of the sea? Rival chiefs, with rival bands of followers, have laid waste vast tracts of country, their inhabitants falling by a cruel death, or into the more fearful doom of slavery. Whole districts have been depopulated, and entire tribes ceased to exist, even in name. The waters of civil life became wormwood, and it might truly be said that many men died of the waters because they were made bitter.

Now the fourth angel sounds—"And there was smitten the third part of the sun, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, that the third part of them might be darkened, and the day might not display its third part, and the night likewise." Already have we seen, in the last lecture, that the sun, moon, and stars signified the

ruling powers, the government of a people. In the sixth chapter, the turning of the sun to darkness, and the moon to blood, and the falling of the stars from heaven, was shown to mean the down-coming of the Jewish government, and the denationalization of Israel, at the destruction of Jerusalem. So that by the blighting of the third part of the sun, and moon, and stars, under heathenism, we are taught what we recognise at once to be the truth, that heathen governments have too often been a curse rather than a blessing to the people under their sway. The duties of rulers—wise legislation, just administration, and the protection of the subject from violence and wrong—these have been lightly held. Rights have been violated, and blood wantonly shed, in mere freak and whim. Reckless tyranny, oppression in its most odious forms has prevailed; property has been rendered insecure; and human life held as little sacred as that of the brutes. It is but too sadly true that, through the ruling power, heathenism has proved an awful curse to every land where it has prevailed.

Four trumpets have sounded, and we have seen idolatry, that great enemy of God, working out its evils for man. We have seen it acting like a blight upon the fruits of the earth; keeping back its victims from the full blessing of intercourse and traffic with other nations; proving a fruitful source of civil war and bloodshed, and turning that government, which was intended as a means of protection, into an instrument of tyranny. The vision of all this misery being preceded by the sounding of the trumpets, seems to indicate that it has come upon idolatrous nations as the outworking of the judgments of God. This is true; but it is also true that it has come to them as the natural outworking of their own sin. You look upon a man who has been living a wild life of excess; you see that his indulgence has ruined his health and shattered his constitution; and you might with equal truth say that his sin has brought him to this wretched state, or that he is suffering the judgment of heaven upon his sin. Both would be true; for in point of fact the judgment of God shows itself in the outworking of natural laws. It is seen in the punishment that sin of itself always brings. And God's dealings with the heathen have been judgments, in the sense that He has left them to

the natural results of those delusions which they themselves embraced.

Thus far, however, we have only marked those results as they are seen affecting man's merely temporal interests. Yet these are the least part of the curse. We are to look for still greater evils; for man has higher interests than those which belong simply to this world. He is a spiritual being. His chief glory is there, and his greatest dangers lie near to his chief glory. We are not surprised, therefore, when John tells us that after four of the seven angels had sounded there was a premonition of still darker sorrows. Through the mid-heaven, on mighty pinion, there flew an eagle,* and to it was given a voice of evil omen, crying,

“Woe, woe, woe
Unto the inhabitants of the land,
Because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet,
Of the three angels who are now to sound!”

After this preliminary cry of warning, the fifth angel sounded. No sooner had the blast filled every ear, than John saw a messenger descend from heaven; and, as he swept through the æther, his track seemed like that of a falling star. When he reached the earth, it was seen that he had in his hand a key—the key of the bottomless pit. With that key he opened the fearsome gate of the fiery abyss, and instantly through the dread portal there rose a dense, blinding smoke, like the cloud from some terrible furnace. The very sun and air seemed all darkened with the thick fumes that came rolling up. As John's eyes became more used to the darkness, he saw that the smoke was filled with a vast multitude of creatures, the like of which he had never seen before. They resembled a cloud of locusts more than anything else; yet they were more terrible: the idea of the locust was there, but it was expanded into a monstrous shape of terror. They were like horses prepared for battle; but upon their heads they had crowns, to indicate their power. Their faces were as the faces of men, and they had long, streaming hair, like a woman's dishevelled locks; fierce teeth had they, like lions, and the overlapping folds on their bosoms seemed like breastplates of iron. They

* The English version has “an angel,” but “an eagle” is the better reading.

resembled scorpions in that they had long tails, in which were deadly stings. Such a multitude were they, that the flapping of their wings was as the sound of a mighty army of horses and chariots rushing to the battle. What a portentous symbol have we here! What shapes of terror rise before the mind! And what a dread conception they give us of all those fearful superstitions which have come forth out of hell, and fastened upon the minds and hearts of the heathen! For this seems to be the idea intended here to be conveyed. If you permit the mind to dwell on those superstitions, as they have been described to us by our missionaries; if you think of their vast multitude, their dreadfully degrading character, their ruinous influence upon human peace and happiness, you will the more readily appreciate the striking image which vividly represents them as a vast swarm of monsters, led forth out of hell by the fierce king of darkness, Apollyon himself.

You will observe that they are commanded not to hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, nor any tree. Their influence is not so much upon nature or upon man's possessions as upon man himself. They hurt "those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads." And mark how expressive is the description of the sufferings they cause. Their power is over man, but not to kill. They do not take away human life: they torment it; they deprive it of peace, honour, and blessing. Their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it striketh a man. They are said to prevail five months, because that is the full term over which the ravages of a swarm of locusts extend; and this signifies that the worshippers of idols shall endure the full effects of their debasing superstitions. These superstitions shall embitter life, and yet cause men to dread death—make them wretched in this world, yet afraid to face the world to come. "In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

It would be easy to show what terrible sufferings superstitions have caused and must cause—suffering of mind, which is infinitely worse than suffering of body. Perhaps a reference to our own history will furnish the most vivid illustration. Time was when our fathers feared the baleful

influence of what they called witchcraft. We smile at it now ; but men of education believed in it once, and its story forms one of the darkest chapters of our annals. There is scarcely a jail record in the kingdom that does not tell of some poor creatures hurried into eternity by violent death, simply because of the silly fears and absurd beliefs of their neighbours. This cruel fate was dreadful enough ; yet it was but a small part of the misery generated by this degrading superstition of the past. Some simple villager, from age, natural infirmity, or deformity, became the object of suspicion. At her approach, her neighbours grew miserable beyond expression, from the belief that a witch's baleful eye of evil was upon them and their cattle. The poor wretch herself was hounded out of the circle in which she had lived. The superstitious fears of her neighbours about her would almost certainly fill her own mind with a nameless dread. sufferings too acute to be described, sufferings that can only be fitly compared to the torment of a scorpion when it striketh a man, must thus have been endured over and over again, through this absurd and baseless superstition of witchcraft. It ravaged the peace of human hearts, as a locust ravages the fields. And this grew up on *Christian* soil and in *Christian* light. What then must have been, what must be still, the direful effect of the vast multitude of similar and even more degrading superstitions, growing up in the darkness of heathenism ! An indefinite shape of dread always strikes more terror than a real evil. The groundless superstitions of the idolater embitter his life. He is filled with restless fear, even when he walks in safety. Those who play upon that fear hold him in their power, and he becomes the victim of tyranny and priestcraft. His relations with his fellow-men are embittered, and he becomes craven or suspicious. His conceptions of God are distorted ; and the great Father, in whom the Christian may trust so tenderly, becomes to him a monstrous shape of terror that darkens his life. He dreads Him as long as he lives, and dreads Him still more as he comes to die. Life is a scene of suffering, and death a leap into the dark. These superstitions come forth out of the bottomless pit ; and Abaddon, the destroyer, is their leader and king.

We have, thus far then, seen the effects of heathenism upon idolaters in every part of their life. It blights the fruits of the earth, keeps men back from the free intercourse of nations, smites them with civil wars and discord, and turns their governments into instruments of tyranny. We have seen too that not only does it affect all man's material interests, but it goes into the very centre of his being and debases his soul. It can only go two steps farther. It may stand by his dying bed, and it may darken his future in the world beyond. Remembering this, we pass to the twelfth verse and read, "One woe is past; and behold there come two woes more hereafter."

These words uttered, the sixth angel sounds. Then John heard a voice, which seemed to come from the midst of the four horns of the golden altar which was before the throne; and it cried, "Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates:" set free the appointed agents of the Divine purposes, who have been hitherto kept back. And there were loosed the four angels who had been made ready unto the hour and day and month and year,—that they should slay the third part of mankind. These angels represent God's power over human life, and they are said to be prepared for the time, whenever it may be—the hour, the day, or month, or year, fixed in the Divine counsels as the appointed time. In carrying out the work assigned them—the ending of human life—they are represented as calling into operation an exceeding great army of horsemen, who seem to be set loose from the neighbourhood of the great river Euphrates. Their number, as John was told, was two myriads of myriads; for death can enter by ways innumerable. On those fierce horsemen came, with breastplates that seemed like fire, or mail of purple hyacinth, or glowing sulphur. Their horses had heads like lions; and, as they swept over the plain, they breathed forth fire and smoke and brimstone. Weird indeed were they; for their very tails were like writhing serpents, and with them they could wound. The form of this symbol receives its explanation when we remember that at one period of Hebrew history, the object of Israel's intensest fears was that army of fierce horsemen who came against them from the cities on the Euphrates. Again and again did they invade and

desolate the land; and the very mention of them aroused such feelings in an Israelite as did the mention of Napoleon I. and his armies in the breasts of our fathers some sixty years ago. Mark the thrilling words in which the prophet speaks of them, as from God: "Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful, their judgments and dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every stronghold; for they shall heap dust and take it" (Hab. i. 6-10). Since the world-renowned cavalry of the East were thus regarded, their forms, exaggerated to fearful shape, might well become the symbols of the forces that should end the unrepentant lives of idolaters. They thus become the impersonations of the fierce diseases generated by heathenism itself, and which sweep away the lives of men. They point to those exterminating wars which again and again have desolated lands "where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile." They are significant of that awful sacrifice of human life, which superstitious worship has demanded in every age. Beneath the mighty wheels of the idol's car have lives innumerable been crushed out. Blood, in streams, has flowed that the spirit of the king might have its convoy of subjects into the realm of the shades. The life of the child has been taken in the temple as atonement for the parents' sins, and the widow has perished on the burning pile that consumed the body of her husband. These dread horsemen may indeed symbolise the fearful shape in which death always comes to the miserable idolater. To the Christian death comes as the kindly messenger, to lead him home. His ear is alive to the music from afar; his glazing eye grows bright again, at the vision of his Father's house; and his lips, ere they stiffen into eternal silence, utter the conse-

crated words of triumph, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, . . . but thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" But the heathen sits in the shadow of death all his life; and, when the dread shape itself appears, it is robed in terror.

"Hark! what mean those lamentations,
Rolling sadly through the sky?
'Tis the cry of heathen nations,
'Come and help us, or we die.'

Hear the heathens' sad complaining;
Christians, hear their dying cry:
And, the love of Christ constraining,
Join to help them ere they die."

Here we must pause for the present. This vision of the seven trumpets goes on to the end of the eleventh chapter, and the remainder of that vision is occupied with the extension of the kingdom of God among the heathen. The consideration of that we must leave to another occasion. But, before we separate, mark the solemn significance of the closing verses before us. We have seen how heathenism curses men, both body and soul, curses them both in life and in death; yet, sad to say, the survivors go on as if it did not. Suffering does not necessarily issue in repentance. "The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood, which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk; neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts." It is a sorrowful and suggestive thought, that men, by a sort of fascination, often go on in their sins long after those sins are felt by them to be degrading and ruinous. We need not go to heathen lands for proof of this. Around us, too often within us, there is proof demonstrative. A man falls into sin; and even before the pleasure is past and the reaction fairly come, he begins to despise and loathe himself for his weakness. Yet, before long, he goes forth and commits that very sin again. Oh what a reality there is under that expression, "the bondage of evil." It is a bondage

indeed, a binding of the man's soul, against the protest of his better nature. It cannot be right with us when we are thus divided against ourselves, when conscience has so often to rise up and lift its solemn protest against the doings of the will and the passions. Nor can we right ourselves; neither is there any natural halting-place in sin, reaching which we shall surely pause. The world of darkness is spoken of as the bottomless pit, because, once yielding to sin, ever downward and still downward a man may sink in baseness, degradation, and misery. The possibilities on both sides within us are overwhelming; the possibilities of nobleness and blessedness, and the possibilities of ruin and wretchedness. My heart is stirred within me as here I stand before God and think of the ascending or descending scale on which every soul in His presence is passing, either to perfect light or outer darkness. The thought gives intense force and meaning to the message of the Gospel we bring to you in Christ. If the bondage of sin is real, the salvation of Jesus is just as real. And it is offered most freely. Oh turn not from Him who is your truest friend—He waits to save. Yield your life to Him, and He will set you free. Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin. But if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

IV.

THE TWO WITNESSES.

REVELATION *x.*, *xi.*

I MUST again remind you, that we are still to be occupied with the *THIRD PART* of this book of the Revelation; for we do not read of the sounding of the last of the seven trumpets till towards the close of the eleventh chapter. The scene of the two witnesses is a portion of the same vision with which we dealt in the last lecture.

As yet, we have only looked upon the evil effects of idolatry on its votaries. There has been nothing said of the spreading of the kingdom of God among the heathen. Yet we may expect that something will be said; for when the seventh trumpet sounds, there are heard great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever." We shall be told something of the course of events ere these kingdoms are won for the Redeemer. But before we turn to that which is told, let me ask you to notice the similarity of construction between the visions of the seven seals and the seven trumpets. In each case, the first four go together and follow closely; the fifth and sixth are more special. When the sixth seal was opened, there was a pause, during which the spiritual Israel were sealed and preserved. In like manner, after the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the kingdom of God comes to view, the two witnesses prophesy, they are overcome and slain, and then they rise again. The heathenism that was not subdued by judgments shall yet be overthrown by the power of the Spirit and the truth which the Spirit wields.

The dark swarm of hellish superstitions has vanished.

The apostle no longer sees those fierce horsemen who are the dread messengers of death. The scene has changed. John beholds now a mighty angel, very different in appearance from the angels of destruction. He appears with all the indications of Divine benignity, power, majesty, dominion. His vesture is a luminous cloud of glory, and round his head is the rainbow of promise and faithful covenant-keeping. His face is like the sun. His feet, like pillars of fire for majesty and strength, rest one on the sea and the other on the land, as though he would assert the right of Him who sent him to unbounded dominion over both. He holds in his hand a little book, and he speaks with royal voice as when a lion roareth. When he had thus spoken, the seven thunders uttered their own, their distinctive voices. Thunder is emblematical of the voice of God; and what the apostle now heard was some utterance of the mind and will of God. The selection of the number seven, as a complete and sacred number, we have frequently noticed already. Probably these seven loud voices described the actual course of the world's evangelization. They may have set forth in what order, by what means, and at what particular times the different heathen nations would become Christian. As these seven voices gave the story of missionary work in its grand outline, John was proceeding to write the same for the Church's enlightenment. But at once a ban was placed upon the mystery. He heard a voice from heaven, saying unto him: "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." It is not for the Church to know beforehand the course of events; for this would interfere with the free agency of Christian workers. As to the plan to be pursued, the lands to be first evangelized, the means to be employed, the sort of men to send forth—in all these things she must be guided step by step as the path of duty opens before her, as the course of Providence unfolds, and as the living Spirit that ever dwells in her midst shall direct.

After this prohibition to reveal what he had heard, the apostle turned to look again on the angel that stood both on sea and land. That glorious being solemnly lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware "by Him that liveth for ever

and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer." That is, that there shall be loss of time no longer, delay, postponement, "but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished," fully accomplished, "as He hath declared to His servants the prophets."

But may nothing be told concerning the great evangelistic work of the future? Can nothing be revealed to strengthen faith, hope, and confidence, without interfering with the freedom of Christian action? Yes, most surely; and all that can be told, consistent with due regard to the fact that here we walk by faith, shall be told. Too much knowledge would interfere with the use of our own understandings, would cripple forethought and free choice of mode and expedient. But, on the other hand, too little would paralyse us by uncertainty. Both extremes therefore were to be avoided; and the same voice which had forbidden the apostle to record what the seven thunders had uttered now speaks to him again, saying, "Go, take the little roll which is opened in the hand of the angel, who stands on the sea and on the earth." To that angel John therefore went, and asked him for the papyrus roll in his hand. And the angel gave it to him, and said, "Take, and eat it up; and it shall make thy inward part bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey." It was as the angel had said; the taste of the papyrus leaf in his mouth was sweet as honey, but after he had eaten it he had a strange sensation of bitterness. This passage receives illustration from God's dealings with Ezekiel. To that prophet also a mysterious hand held out a scroll which he was commanded to eat; and this was the explanation of the symbolical act—"All my words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears; and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God." John also was to eat—to receive, and then declare. The revelation was to enter into the soul's inmost being, to be turned into the

very blood of the inner life; and then he must prophesy *with regard to*—not “before”—peoples, and with regard to “nations and tongues and kings many.”

Both Ezekiel and John ate the scroll, and with both the first taste was sweet as honey; for to the faithful, who love God, it is always a joy to receive a communication from God, a joy to hear His voice at all. They know that what He says will be sure to be holy, just, and good. It may sometimes seem even stern; yet it cannot but be loving and kind. Even when the necessity for judgment comes, they know that it is a necessity determined by Him who is “the Lord, the Lord merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth.” All that they comprehend, they clearly see to be just and right; and that which they see not, they are confident is the same. Therefore God’s word commands the truest loyalty of their nature, and they feel that though the heart be even torn with anguish at its message, yet it is better thus. And thus with anguish the heart is often torn by God’s communications to the soul: when Ezekiel had eaten the scroll, he went in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit; and when John had inwardly digested the message of the Lord, the after-taste was bitter. It was God’s message: therefore was it sweet and pleasant; but perchance it spoke of man’s neglect of his day of grace, of those to whom the gospel came, trampling under foot the Son of God. To some men the messenger is a savour of death unto death; and how can he but feel the burden of the Lord, and grieve, and be in bitterness for the folly and sin of those who despise and perish? His whole being may approve the message; yet, in the pensive sadness of all deeply thoughtful natures, he drinks the cup of truth and eats the bread of Divine knowledge. That which John thus received from the angel could not but have to him many after-elements of sorrow: for, ere the victory was won, there were to be days of tribulation, when faithful men would be trodden down. The conflict would end triumphantly; but the way to the end was the way of the cross. There would intervene days of sorrow, when the disciple would be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. Therefore, though the first taste of the roll was sweet as honey, yet afterward there came the feeling of bitterness.

When he has told us this, he gives the message I have quoted, in which the angel says that he must prophesy with regard to many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. The eleventh chapter contains the substance of his deliverance. A temple rises in vision before him. It seemed to be the temple with which he had been familiar, as a Jewish worshipper, in Jerusalem. There was the sacred building itself, and the outer courts around it. As the apostle looked on this fair structure, a measuring-reed was put into his hand, and the angel said to him, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple, leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the nations; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months." The temple itself, as well as the Jewish ritual, had its place and meaning in the Divine scheme of truth. It symbolised the Christian Church, the kingdom of God on the earth; and the glory in the most holy place showed that the Lord was constantly present in the midst. We are familiar with this thought in such passages as these: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. The temple of God is holy; which temple ye are." Read in the light thus afforded, the passage before us indicates that there should be a manifestation of God's kingdom in the heathen world. That kingdom, when measured, would conform to the Divine standard. But its outer court should be trodden down by unholy feet—it should be profaned for forty and two months. Nothing vital should be lost; but in most heathen lands the gospel would be resisted, and its followers persecuted. The Church should, in part and for a definite period, be trodden under foot of the nations. During this time of conflict, however, God would raise up His faithful witnesses, who should prophesy in sackcloth, that is, in sorrow, for a thousand two hundred and threescore days. They should even be killed, but should rise

again. The Spirit of life from God should enter into them; and, amidst the fear of their enemies, they should be translated to heaven in a cloud of glory.

We thus come into the region of those mystical numbers, by the assistance of which many have ventured to predict the precise year of our Lord's second coming. Assuming that a prophetic day means a natural year, they take the time here mentioned to mean 1260 years; and, fixing upon some arbitrary starting-point, about twelve centuries ago, they come down to our own times.

In putting another explanation before you, let me remind you that twelve hundred and sixty days is the same thing as forty and two months. They each amount to three years and a half. This is a simple matter of arithmetic. These three years and a half are, both in this book (xii. 14) and in the Book of Daniel (xii. 7), spoken of, poetically, as a time, times, and half a time. Now, whichever of these forms of expression is used, it always refers to a time of great trouble, a time when evil powers are triumphant. In this eleventh chapter, for instance, the holy city is said to be trodden under foot forty and two months, and the two witnesses are to be clothed in sackcloth a thousand two hundred and threescore days. Again, in the next chapter, it is said, "The woman fled into the wilderness a thousand two hundred and threescore days." It is also said that she should be "nourished in that wilderness for a time, times, and a half, from the face of the serpent." In the thirteenth chapter, again, it is said that "power was given to the beast to continue forty and two months." And when Daniel speaks of the same period,—the time, times, and a half,—he says, "It shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." If, therefore, you will bear in mind that the twelve hundred and sixty days, the forty and two months, the time, times, and a half, and the three years and a half, are only different ways of speaking of the same time, and that that was a time of special sorrow, we shall have taken a very important step towards the solution we seek.

I think we shall find that while both Daniel and John refer to this time thus variously described, Daniel is pointing forward, with prophet's finger, to actual facts that did take place in Jewish history,—and John is looking back on

the same facts, and using them to symbolise future times of sorrow for the Church of God. They speak of them differently, just as the tabernacle and the sacrifices are spoken of differently in the Book of Leviticus and the Epistle to the Hebrews. But you will understand me more easily if I first refer to the actual history which is the basis of the symbol.

Between the Old Testament and the New there is an interval of no less than four centuries. Malachi was the last prophet, and Nehemiah the last national leader of Israel, spoken of in the Old Testament. After the death of Nehemiah a curtain falls on the history of the Jews, through the thick and impenetrable folds of which we catch but rare and doubtful glimpses for two centuries and more. In the year 175 B.C., the curtain is uplifted: that year, Antiochus Epiphanes rose to power, as one of the kings of northern Syria. As Daniel tells us he would (xi. 21), he gained the kingdom by flatteries and bribery, for he was not the lawful heir to the throne of the Seleucidæ. Along with other possessions, there came to him the kingdom of Judæa, as a tributary province; and for some years he ruled it in peace. Seven years after his accession, he went down into Egypt on a military expedition. While there, it was falsely reported he was dead. The rumour reached Jerusalem, where it produced an insurrection and an attempt to throw off the Syrian yoke. By the time that tidings of the insurrection reached Antiochus, it was magnified into a deliberate revolt of the whole nation. Greatly incensed, and without delay, he marched against Jerusalem, and in three days, it is said, he put to death 40,000 of the inhabitants. Nor did this suffice him. He proceeded to wanton outrage against the religion of the people. He entered into every court of the temple, and pillaged the treasury. He seized all the sacred vessels, the golden candlestick, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense, carrying away booty to the amount of 1800 talents of gold. He then commanded a swine, the unclean animal of the Jews, to be sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering. Some of its flesh was boiled, and the liquid was sprinkled over every part of the temple. Thus with the most odious defilement he desecrated the holy place of the Most High.

Time passed on, and brought reverses to him. He was driven forth from Egypt by the Romans. His way back home lay through Judæa. Maddened by defeat, he revenged himself by greater atrocities on Jerusalem. One Sabbath day, when the people were unsuspecting, the soldiers were let loose upon them; and before that day's sun had set, the streets ran down with blood. Even before this, the public services of the sanctuary had ceased. No songs were heard within the courts of Zion. No offerings there were brought. Nor did the cessation of the old religious services satisfy Antiochus. He strove to force the heathenism of Greece upon the Hebrew people, issuing an edict for uniformity of worship throughout his dominions. He prohibited every observance of the Jewish religion. He compelled the people to profane the Sabbath, to eat swine's flesh and other unclean food, and expressly forbade the great national rite of circumcision. Even farther than this he went, in his daring impiety. He set up an image of Jupiter Olympius on the altar of burnt offering; and there, in the place sacred to the Lord of hosts, was sacrifice offered to the heathen god. In the language of the chapter before us, the court of the temple was given unto the Gentiles, and the holy city was trodden under foot. As a last insult, the festivals of the bacchanalia were substituted for the national feast of tabernacles, and the reluctant Jews were compelled to join in these riotous orgies, and to carry the ivy, the insignia of the god. "*So near was the Jewish nation, so near the worship of Jehovah to total extermination.*" *

But at this crisis the Most High Himself interfered. In this time of such sorrow as had never been known before, He raised up a little band of brave men, whose patriotism would do honour to any nation. By their adventurous valour, their sagacious soldiership, and their generous self-devotion, they won back from the spoiler their city and their land. In the town of Modin lived the aged Mattathias and his five sons. The old man summoned all who were zealous for the law to his standard, and their numbers rapidly increased. But, before the work was consummated, the brave veteran had gone to rest. With his dying hand he passed on the banner of the good cause to his famous

* Milman's "History of the Jews," vol. i.

son, Judas Maccabæus. After many a gallant struggle for independence, the brave Maccabee gained a decisive victory at Hebron, and in triumph marched on to Jerusalem. The holy city was a heart-rending sight. Grass, and even shrubs, were growing in the courts of the temple; every part of the sacred edifice had been profaned, and the chambers of the priests thrown down. At the painful sight these brave men wept like little children. But they brushed away their tears, and the work of restoration went on apace. The temple was repaired, and every part of it purified from the profanation of the heathen; a new altar was constructed, and out of the spoil taken from the foe the sacred vessels were replaced. Then, when as much preparation had been made as was required for the service, for eight days they celebrated the feast of dedication; and those eight days have been sacred ever since in the calendar of the Jews. But the great fact of special importance to us in our inquiry is this: from the time when Antiochus first defiled the temple and stopped the daily sacrifice, to the time when the Maccabees restored the temple and celebrated the feast of dedication, was forty and two months, or 1260 days, or three years and a half, or a time, times, and a half.

Nor is this a time of sorrow singled out arbitrarily, because it meets the needful condition as to duration. Daniel is distinctly pointing to Antiochus and the outrages he committed, when he first refers to the mystic period, a time, times, and a half. Reading from the twenty-first verse of the eleventh chapter of his book, we have the course of Antiochus clearly described beforehand in the spirit of prophecy. Driven from Egypt (verse 30 *et seq.*), he should return in indignation against the holy covenant. He should band with traitors against that covenant. "They shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate;" that is, they shall place the image of Jupiter on the altar of God. "Such (from among the Jews) as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flatteries," which was the fact; "but the people that do know their God," the Maccabees and their faithful followers, "shall be strong and do exploits." In the next

chapter one is represented as asking the man clothed in white linen, who had made these revelations—"How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" And the man clothed in white linen, solemnly lifting up both hands to heaven, "sware by Him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half." Daniel says that he heard this reply, but could not understand it, and he asked anxiously, "O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" But no clearer message was given, "for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." He can merely know further that the period referred to should be a testing time when it came. The righteousness of good men, and the wickedness of bad men, shall come out more clearly, as indeed they do in every time of crisis. "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." A time, times, and a half, that is 1260 days, should elapse between the taking away of the daily sacrifice, and the celebration of the feast of dedication by Judas Maccabæus. But thirty days more would be required for entire reconstruction, which would make the interval 1290 days. It is then added, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five-and-thirty days;" for then, at the end of these additional forty-five days, Antiochus Epiphanes, the tyrant who had desolated the holy place, lay a dying man, perishing miserably of a fearful disease. The time of complete deliverance came, when the words of the prophet (xi. 45) were fulfilled, "He shall come to his end, and none shall help him."

Now it is plain, I think, that both Daniel and John refer to the same dreadful, never to be forgotten, time in Jewish history. Till Jerusalem's final overthrow there was no other such period as that under Antiochus, when the sacred fire went out on the altar, and the daily sacrifice ceased. With the finger of the seer, Daniel pointed *forward* to that time of unparalleled sorrow, and prepared his countrymen for its coming. In vision, John looks *backward* to it, and sees therein an illustration of the course of the kingdom of God in heathen lands in coming time. His meaning was plainly this: the ancient people of God had once to pass

through 1260 days of awful depression, when the religion of Jehovah was trampled under foot by the heathen. There shall be something like it again and again in the history of the kingdom of God. We need not, of course, press the actual number of 1260 days, and say that every period of persecution will be of the same length, neither more nor less. The bitter experiences of that awful time made those days a symbolic period, symbolic of all future times, both long and short, when the Church should be veiled in sorrow. It pointed to such tribulations as when the Christians were hidden away in the long, winding galleries of the catacombs of Rome, and when many a brave martyr spirit went through the wild beasts' den to his crown of glory. Passing by a long interval, with the many illustrations it might furnish, and coming to our own times, that symbolic period also pointed to and in its manifold reference included such sufferings as those lately endured in the island of Madagascar. May we not say that the Church there had her 1260 days of sorrow, when her children were burdened with irons, sent into exile, or speared, or poisoned with the tangena water, or dashed to pieces over that Tarpeian rock at Antananarivo? Truly, then did God's witnesses prophesy in sackcloth, and the holy city was trodden under foot of the Gentiles.

But, to return to the chapter more immediately before us, even in such dark days as these, God should have His faithful witnesses. They are spoken of as two in number, because so many were required for legal proof in any important matter. They are clothed in sackcloth, as mourning over the desolation of the Church. They are the two olive-trees. Zechariah used the same figure to denote those filled with the sacred oil, the Spirit of God. As the lights of a dark world, they are the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. As the olive-trees, they are full of life; as the lamps, they are full of light. Moreover, they are the objects of the Divine care. "If any man desires to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man desires to hurt them, thus must he be slain." This signifies that he who toucheth them touches the apple of God's eye, and for the persecutor the day of reckoning will come. These

witnesses "have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will." That is, the same God is with them who was with Moses, when rising up against the heathen power of Egypt, and demanding Israel's freedom, he turned the Nile into blood, and smote the land with terrible plagues. The same God is with them who was with Elijah when he delivered his testimony against the heathen abominations of Ahab and Jezebel, and when in answer to his prayer the heaven was shut up and there was no rain for three years and a half. The power which was in these men was God's power; therefore in all ages He can put it forth in new forms, and with ever-varying application.

When these witnesses have finished their testimony—when God has no further need of their service here—when their death shall be more fruitful of blessing than their life—then "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." This beast we shall see hereafter to be worldly power, animated by the spirit of the wicked one. It shall seem as if their cause is hopeless for a while. Their dead bodies lie exposed to scorn, unburied. The place of their fall is the street of that world which is called Sodom, for its wickedness; Egypt, as the scene of Israel's bondage; and Jerusalem, for its murder of the Lord. In all ages the world is the same; its form and mode may change, but its dislike of the condemning holiness of Christ is unchanged.

There shall be great rejoicings among the wicked, as they come from far and near to mock the down-trodden hope of the Church. Now that the witnesses are gone, they will make merry and send gifts one to another. They congratulate themselves they are well rid of the truth that has troubled them. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" cries Ahab to Elijah. The truth is a torment to a guilty conscience, because it finds an echo within; for the word of God and the heart of man were made for each other, and He who made the heart never leaves Himself without witness therein. His word comes to man in no uncertain

guise. It is quick and powerful, going straight to the conscience. Therefore, however feeble the witnesses may be in themselves, they have God's power with them. Their removal brought back disturbed peace, "because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth."

But the merry-makings and rejoicings were premature. After three days and a half, that is after a short time, the spirit of life from God comes into them again. The men die, but their principles live; the witnesses are mortal, but the truth itself is undying. Others rise and take their places. There is a resurrection of their principles in the hearts of those who come after them. Amidst the fear of those who rejoiced before, "they stood upon their feet." The time of the glorification of faithful souls comes at length, and their heavenward destiny is manifest to all. "They heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them." At the same time there is also made manifest the disastrous, the final consequences to their enemies of their wicked opposition to the Church of God. "And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand; and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven."

We have now reached the end of the long parenthesis which began with the tenth chapter, and we must connect this fourteenth verse in our thoughts with the conclusion of the ninth chapter. After the fourth trumpet had sounded, you will remember an eagle was seen flying through the midst of heaven, crying three times, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels which are yet to sound." Then, after the fearful host of dreadful superstitions like a swarm of locusts had issued from the bottomless pit at the sounding of the fifth angel, it was said, "One woe is past; and behold, there come two woes more hereafter." Then, as the sixth angel sounds, the agents of death are let loose like a multitude of horsemen; and, passing over the episode of the two witnesses we have just considered, we come to the fourteenth verse of the

eleventh chapter, where it is written, "The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly." We have seen heathenism smiting man's temporal interests with blight, making him the victim of debasing superstitions and arraying death with fearful terror. There remains only one other woe we can think of further, the woe which eternity brings. But some may ask, Will eternity bring woe to the idolater? Will the heathen be lost at last? Will they who have had so little light, who from childhood have been hemmed in by the environments of idolatry, will they be cast into hell? On this subject we may not overpass the solemn reserve of Scripture. There shall be distinctions of doom. He who will be our Judge has Himself affirmed that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the unrepentant in Jerusalem; more tolerable for those who have lived in darkness than for those who have scorned the light. But, while clinging to the larger hope, let us not overlook a solemn fact which too often is overlooked. It is this: to be given up to the dominion of sin is to be lost; to be the slave of bad passions, to be in love with cruelty, vice, treachery, and uncleanness, to be estranged from God, the Father of our spirits, this is to be lost. The soul, morally corrupt to its inmost core, needs but to become further conscious of God's frown as eternity reveals it; and hell is there.

When the course of the conflict of God's truth and Spirit with idolatry has been wholly revealed, "the seventh angel sounded: and there were great voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.'" The glorious visions of the future vouchsafed to seers of old have all been realized. The gospel has been preached to all the nations for a witness; the idols are utterly abolished; Christ sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied; the book of time is closed, eternity begins. As the great voices sounded, "the four-and-twenty elders who sat before God on their thrones fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying,

We give thanks to Thee, O Lord God,
The Almighty who is, and who was,
That Thou hast taken Thy great power and reigned.

And the nations were enraged, and Thy vengeance came,
And the time for the dead to be judged,
And to give the reward to Thy servants the prophets,
And the holy, and those who fear Thy name :
Unto the small and unto the great :
And to destroy the destroyers of the earth."

When the vision of the seven seals reached its end all heaven paused in solemn silence. This vision of the seven trumpets comes to a close amid signs that show that an important revelation from God has now been made. "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant." The holiest of all in the temple was the sacred presence chamber of the Lord. Of all living men the high-priest alone was permitted to enter, and he only once a year, and that with great solemnities. There, in that holy place, veiled from common eyes, was the ark of the covenant. But now, as John looks, the shrine is opened and the ark is seen. There is no longer an enclosing wall, no longer a concealing curtain. The secret of the Lord is made known, and His counsels declared. Therefore is His glory manifested, and when it was seen "there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."

So falls the curtain again upon the great drama. Again have we looked upon symbols that stretch on to the judgment day, and are complete in themselves therefore, while forming part of the greater whole. When next we look, another line of thought will open before us, and upon other fields we shall enter. Meanwhile thus much we have surely learned: the great work of the missionary is no doubtful enterprise. Many of the kingdoms of this world are groping in heathen darkness now, but they shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. As part of His Church, let us thank God and take courage.

"Kings shall fall down before Him,
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing:
For He shall have dominion
O'er river, sea, and shore,
Far as the eagle's pinion
Or dove's light wing can soar.

V.

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON.

REVELATION xii.

THUS far we have seen, in vision, the power of apostate Judaism broken, and heathenism overthrown. Now we enter upon the **FOURTH PART** of the book of Revelation, and other aspects of the kingdom of God will come before us. We have looked at dangers threatening the Church from without; our attention will now be called to those rising up from within. The corruption of Divine truth, departures from the simplicity of the faith, decline of spiritual life, unholy alliance with the power and wealth of this world; upon these things judgment is now about to be declared. These are even greater perils than the opposition of Judaism or heathenism. For while the Church remained pure of faith and simple in life, she stood strong, and enemies from without only drove her more closely to the side of her crucified but risen Lord. While the witnesses prophesy among the heathen, they are as olive-trees full of life, as golden lamps full of light. But when once the Church's life and light decline, the salt has lost its savour, and wherewith shall it be salted?

This Fourth Part is very differently arranged from the Second and Third Parts. It extends over no less than nine chapters, as you will see from the fact that while the dragon rises before us in this twelfth chapter, his judgment is not declared till the twentieth chapter. The really central idea of this Fourth Part is the outpouring of the seven vials,—the manifestation of judgment upon corrupt adulterated forms of the religious life, as described in the sixteenth chapter. But other thoughts gather round this; and the four chapters that precede the sixteenth are prelimi-

nary, and the four that follow supplementary. There is an organic unity, however, running through the whole, which we shall be able to trace as we proceed.

The kingdom of heaven on earth has not only to struggle against human foes, but also against superhuman. Indeed, the hatred, the prejudice, the ignorance and superstition of man are stimulated from behind by those whom the eye sees not. On this matter we know only what we are told. But He whose heart is set on our salvation has not left us in total darkness. The curtain is lifted, not enough to satisfy curiosity, but enough to excite us to vigilance. The spiritual conflict is deepened in solemnity, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Dark and portentous shapes flit to and fro in the background of human life and destiny; and the fact is here displayed in vision before us. This twelfth chapter is descriptive of the bitter malignity of the dread prince of evil against Christ and His Church. His dark doings are presented in their threefold aspect. We have first, his determined attempt to crush the work of Christ before it was finished; secondly, his desperate endeavours to impugn its worth and validity when it was finished; and thirdly, when both these were unsuccessful, his unwearied attempts to keep back from Christ those who have not yet come to Him, and to separate from Him those who have.

First, there is described *the resolute attempt of the enemy of souls to crush the work of Christ before it was finished*. On that same heavenly stage on which John has already seen so many wondrous things enacted, he now beholds a new portent. There appeared there a great wonder, or rather a great sign; for it does not merely create astonishment, it has a meaning and an object. A woman stood forth, having the sun for her vesture, the moon beneath her feet, and upon her brow a glittering crown of twelve stars. This woman is the Church, the bride of the Lord. Sun, moon, and stars—all earthly powers and governments—are subordinated to her welfare. For her completion and blessing, and on her behalf, God rules, overrules, and continues the world. "And being with child, she cried, travelling

and pained to be delivered." For in the midst of the true Israel should the Messiah be born. Out of her should Shiloh come, the long expected Deliverer. The Redeemer was the one hope of humanity, the desire of all nations; but for His coming the true Israel especially looked long and anxiously. Therefore it is said that, "she being with child, cried, travailling in birth and pained to be delivered."

But another sign challenged the attention of the apostle. Behold there was a great red dragon—red, the colour of fire and blood—red, as the symbol of the waster and the destroyer. He had seven crowned heads to indicate his widespread dominion, and ten horns to show the manifold forms in which his malignant energy is displayed. This ravaging monster is the fit emblem of the god of this world,—the devil, or Satan. He is described in such a way as to show that he is not an enemy to be despised, but rather to be guarded against with holy fear. "And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth." He dragged with him into rebellion, and therefore into ruin, some who had been the sons of God and the stars of the morning. He is represented as waiting to devour the expected Child as soon as it should be born. Unto us that Child was born, that Son was given, and He was to rule all nations with an imperishable sceptre, a rod of iron, and the government was to be upon His shoulders. Against Him the hatred of the dragon prevails not. The Child was caught up unto God, and to His throne. The woman, the Church, the bride, goes for discipline into the wilderness, where she must pass through her conflict, her 1260 days of sorrow, during which, however, she is Divinely sustained; for in the wilderness she hath a place prepared of God. There, like Israel of old, she has bread from heaven and water from the stricken rock. The symbolic scene thus described points to solemn and mysterious aspects of the Saviour's life on earth. His purpose here was to destroy the works of the devil, to break the chain of the bondage of corruption, and to set the captive free. The strong man armed seemed to keep his spoils in peace till the stronger than he appeared. Then came the bitter conflict. The appearance of Emmanuel was the signal for the gathering up of all the forces of the kingdom of darkness. With

deadly hate Satan resisted the mission of the Son of God. We are not to content ourselves by explaining all Scriptural allusions to the evil one as merely figurative modes of speaking of evil principles. The language throughout is simply bewildering, unless it refers to a real personality having actual existence in the unseen world—to a living spirit of evil, the bitter enemy of God and man. He tempted man to his ruin at first, and his resolute endeavour was to keep the ascendancy he had gained. When the Saviour came to take the prey from the mighty, he confronted Him from the hour of His birth to the day of His ascension, when He was caught up to God and His throne. He sought to end His bodily life, and to frustrate His spiritual mission. He instigated Herod to the massacre of the innocents. Then the dragon seemed literally to seek the life of the Child as soon as it was born, and the flight into Egypt preserved the infant Saviour from the malice of hell, as displayed in the hatred of the king. In after-days, Satan nerved the arms of those who took up stones to stone Him. He animated with bitterest dislike the chief priests and rulers of the people. It is distinctly affirmed that it was he that led Judas on to his awful crime. After the sop, Satan entered into Judas, and then it was that Jesus said, "What thou doest, do quickly." The betrayal, the false swearing, the cruel mockery and scourging, the dark deed on Calvary—all these had a human side. But they had another aspect also: they were the outgoings of the hate of the prince of this world: they were the fiery breath of that red dragon which John beheld in vision. Nor was this the only form the conflict took. Into a spiritual realm it went, where we have to look on it from afar, for the ground is too shadowy for us to tread. Before our Lord began His public ministry, He was fiercely tempted of the devil. The evil one first urged Him to satisfy His lower wants at the expense of His higher nature, to obtain a lawful blessing in a way contrary to the will of the Father. He sought to lead the Saviour to rest in the enchanted land of an unjust and measureless abundance, and to crave after a glory of the flesh which should overpower the spirit. Then, changing his line of attack, the enemy urged Him to an act of presumption, on the strength of the promise, "He shall give

His angels charge concerning Thee, and they shall bear Thee up in their hands, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." "Show Thyself to Israel," he seems to say, "in a way that shall at once win Thee the kingdom. Throw Thyself down from this lofty cornice of the temple; the promise about the angels shows that Thou mayest do it safely, and these people in the court below shall at once recognise Thee as the Lord, of whom it is said, 'He shall suddenly come to His temple.'" This temptation failed also, and finally the enemy urged Him to a worship of evil for the sake of success. "Fall down and worship me, and all these kingdoms of the world shall be Thine. Without waiting to tread the slow but appointed way, without the suffering and obedience and death, Thou shalt have the crown. Worship me, and at once I, the god of this world, will let go my hold, and all shall be Thine." But the Saviour, at every turn, met and vanquished the enemy by the sword of the Spirit. Yet, in after days, that enemy returned again and again to the charge. Especially did he put forth his power in the last mysterious agony. It is described as the hour and power of darkness. It was then at the end, even as at the beginning of that atoning life, the fierce dragon gathered up all his forces in the contest. Feeling it was now or never, he sought to crush the work of salvation, foreseeing that it would surely be the ruin of his kingdom. All through the Saviour's life there overshadowed Him a dark and baleful influence, whose presence even we can faintly see and feel. It enters into the Saviour's very soul, and pierces Him with keen distress. It enters into the souls of His enemies, and drives them on madly to their daring sin. The conflict all through was most real, though most mysterious; and it comes before us again as we behold the great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads, standing before the woman, ready to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

Secondly, Satan having failed to prevent the accomplishment of the work of salvation, next *sought to render it unavailing.*

The Child was caught up unto God and His throne. The Saviour's work was finished, and then accepted. The heavenly gates lifted up their heads, and the King of glory

passed through—passed through to that joy for which He had endured the cross, despising the shame. There seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, He was restored to the glory He had with the Father before the world was. And now we have a symbolic representation of the stability and unimpeachable character of the work He had accomplished. On the same stage as before, in that royal chamber which is called heaven, there was enacted a great and terrible conflict. There was war in heaven. The forces on both sides were superhuman. The hosts of light were led to the fray by Michael the archangel, and the dark forces of their enemies followed the dragon's command. Fiercely the warriors met in deadly strife. Grandly the celestial armour threw off each fiery dart and rendered harmless each mighty blow. Never on earthly battle-field was there a shock of arms like this. Never was the prize contended for of such vast moment. Never was a victory more complete or more glorious. The dragon and his crew were utterly beaten back. "The dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was place found any more for them in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Then as the vanquished foes were hurled over the battlements, there rose one glad psalm of victory ringing through the azure vault, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

Now what is the meaning of this Holy War, and what the victory that was won?

We must not forget that both the battle and the victory are symbolic; we are not therefore to look in this passage for the actual history of Satan's first fall from God and

heaven. There is very little indeed on that subject plainly declared in Scripture. The popular notions about Satan and his fall are derived more from Milton's poem than from the word of God. And while the poem is a great work of imagination, it is an unsafe guide through the mysteries of the unseen world. The fall of the angels is veiled in all but the deepest silence. Beyond the fact we know scarcely anything. At all events, we have not even a reference to that first overthrow in the symbolic passage before us. The war took place after the Child was caught up to God and His throne,—that is, after the ascension of Christ,—and therefore could not refer to an apostasy which took place before the creation of man.

We shall have some clue to the meaning of the mystic battle here described, if we first ask who was this Michael who led the hosts of light to conflict? The name signifies—"who is like God?" and in itself seems a very challenge to the enemies of God. Elsewhere we find him referred to. The apostle Jude calls him Michael the archangel. This will help us a step in our inquiry. There are various passages in Scripture which intimate the existence of ranks and gradations of dignity among the angelic hosts. We read of thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. High above the rest is one who towers in state, dignity and might. He is called the archangel, and, so far as we know, is the only one; for we never read of archangels. He will be the precursor of judgment. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the *voice of the archangel*, and with the trump of God." There is one archangel then, and Michael is his name.

Now this Michael was regarded as the special champion of the Church, the guardian of the spiritual Israel. This thought is clearly expressed in the book of the prophet Daniel. We have already seen that the closing chapters of that book set forth the times of trouble that would come to Israel after their return from captivity. Daniel tells us that in the third year of Cyrus he was beside the great river Hiddekel, and there appeared unto him a glorious form. He was clothed in linen, and his loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes

as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. At his appearance a great quaking fell upon the men who were with Daniel, so that they fled to hide themselves. Daniel himself was overwhelmed, and there remained no strength in him. Placing this description side by side with that in the first chapter of the Revelation, we cannot doubt they describe one and the same being—the Son of God Himself. He appears to Daniel to make him understand what shall befall his people in the latter days. He represents Himself as fighting against the enemies of Israel, and He says (x. 13) “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, the first of the princes, came to help me.” He says again (ver. 20, 21), “now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia . . . and there is none that holdeth with me but Michael your prince.” And the twelfth chapter thus begins—“At that time,” that is at the time when Antiochus Epiphanes should try to crush out of existence the Hebrew people, in the manner I have already described, “at that time shall Michael stand up, *the great prince which standeth for the children of Thy people.*” Reading these passages together, and in their connection, we seem to have the idea of a nation having its guardian angel, who in times of great crisis appears on its behalf. Under Emmanuel, Michael stands forth as the great champion of ancient Israel, that Israel which was the type of the Church of God. The symbol of this vision before us has for its basis the idea so plainly implied in the Book of Daniel, and we must interpret the one by the other.

This war, enacted on that heavenly stage, was waged between Michael, the great champion, and Satan, the great enemy of the Church of God. It was no literal battle, of course. It was a highly figurative mode of showing us, that when the evil one had failed to hinder the completion of Christ's work on earth, he carried his hostility into the unseen world. He sought to rob the Church of the benefits of Christ's death. In what precise form he did this, it is of course difficult to say. The opposition of the dragon to the work of Christ, before it was finished, was most real; this further endeavour must be just as real.

But in what form it was put forth, is, I repeat, not for us to affirm distinctly. The aspects of the great atoning work that look away from us, into the world unseen, must remain in a mystery while we are here. That there are such aspects I do not for one moment doubt; and it is impossible to have a true theory of the atonement without admitting their existence. But, without seeking to dogmatise in a region where dogmatism must be peculiarly out of place, we may gather some few rays of light from this and other portions of the word of God.

Satan is here called the accuser of the brethren—he accused them before our God day and night. He is the devil, Diabolus, because he is the accuser, the slanderer. He slanders God to man—so he gained the victory over our first parents. He also slanders man to God. Thus he slandered Job. In the beginning of the book that bears the patriarch's name, Satan is represented as presenting himself before the Lord among the sons of God. In the world of spirits, where all the mysteries of existence are brought to light, Satan, the accusing angel, threw out a charge against Job, in the sneer: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." His bitter accusations and assaults are also strikingly set forth in vision, in the book of the prophet Zechariah (iii. 1—7). After the return of the exiles from Babylon, their patriotic endeavours to rebuild the temple of the Lord stirred up the malice of their enemies. Joshua, the high-priest at that time, was singled out especially as the object of their attack, and, probably, formal charges were laid against him at the Persian court. In vision, the prophet sees him summoned before a higher tribunal. "He showed me Joshua, the high-priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Despite the charges of the adversary, Joshua was solemnly acquitted. And this was done with the forms still usual in an Eastern court. The filthy garments, in which the accused was expected to stand, were

taken away, and the robe of honour was put upon him, in token that his innocence had been established. Acquitted at that bar, therefore, he need not fear any earthly accuser. These readings from the Old Testament will help us to a right understanding of these symbols in the New. Satan accuses the people of God in the presence of God. He brings up all their sin and unworthiness, shows their imperfection of motive, their defection of life. He accuses them to God day and night. He says they are not worthy to be saved; not worthy to be exalted to the glories of heaven. All this is too true; and yet the accuser utterly fails. The accuser of our brethren is cast down. And here is the secret of their victory—"they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." The Church does not take her stand upon her own worthiness, but upon the worthiness of her Lord. Believing souls hope to enter the kingdom of life, not because they have deserved it, but because He won it for them. Each one says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." All defilement are we; but God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but, admitting the charge, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. This is our only plea; but we need no other, for this is mighty and all-prevailing. They overcame the accuser by the blood of the Lamb. This description of the battle in the skies is only another way of saying, that none shall ever pluck out of the Saviour's hands those who have fled for refuge to Him. The enemy takes his charges into the highest court of all, the only court we need care for, the court of heaven; and even there they utterly break down. Michael, the Church's champion under Christ, drives back on her behalf the dragon and his angels. Satan is ignominiously driven from the place of testimony, and hurled out of heaven. For the atoning work is complete, and avails for the darkest and deepest sins that ever man committed. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost them that come

unto God by Him. Brethren, this vision is not a mere picture to please the fancy, but a grand unfolding of truth to comfort the heart. Our bitterest enemy is seen trying his utmost to ruin us, and he signally fails. And be sure, if he fails, no one can succeed; for we have not another foe so powerful, so unrelenting as he. Let us look at this mystic war in heaven again; and, seeing on which side the tide of victory turns, let us then open the Book elsewhere and read those grand utterances which have filled with heavenly joy many a desponding heart—"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The vision goes on, thirdly, to show how Satan, driven out of heaven, *puts forth all his strength on the earth*. We have seen how, in two things, he was foiled. He strove to turn Christ from the work of salvation; but the Saviour went on, faithful even to death. He next strove to hinder the work of atonement from taking due effect on behalf of the sinner; in this also he failed. There is yet one other hope. He will bring all his malignity to bear upon them that dwell upon the earth. By wile and stratagem, by force and fraud, he will strive to keep from Christ those who are seeking, and to tear from Christ those who have found. This is why the loud voice that John heard, cried, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." The outcast dragon, finding himself upon the earth, began to persecute the woman,

began to vent all his rage upon those who were following Christ on the earth. But the Lord bears the Church as upon eagles' wings. "To the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place,"—the place where she is to be disciplined and meetened in sorrow for the heavenly joy. There, though it is a wilderness, she is Divinely sustained through her season of tribulation, for a time, times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent; but, though Divinely protected, she is constantly assailed. "The serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." Elsewhere we read of the enemy coming in like a flood. It is a graphic way of describing the vehemence, the multitude of hostile influences he sets at work. But they come to nothing. "The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." The lies, the slanders, die out in the natural course of things. They have no vitality of their own, and they perish after a while, as though the earth had opened her mouth, and swallowed them up. The enemy is utterly unable to destroy the corporate life of the Church. That lives on, whatever comes and goes. Ever since Jesus gathered round Him that first little band of disciples, He has had a Church on the earth, and ever will have till the end. There have been days of darkness and decline, when the true seed of Israel seemed all but gone; but He who sees in secret has had His hidden faithful ones, who have kept up the holy succession. Even then there were more who had not bowed the knee to Baal than the prophet who was jealous for the Lord of hosts could see. The Church of Christ, meaning by that the great spiritual community which rises above all the narrow bounds of sect and party, and embraces all faithful souls who live in Christ, this the one true Church has had a wonderful vitality these eighteen centuries and more. Political and social institutions have ceased to be; great dynasties have passed away; there has been one continued process of upheaval: yet the Church that met in the upper room at Jerusalem is with us still. This is a marvellous fact, if you think of it. The flood has been strong and fierce, yet the foundation on which the Church is built has

withstood the storm. Against that rock, the gates of hell could not prevail.

But when the dragon could not destroy the woman, he was very wroth. Then he went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. That one existence, which we call the Church of the living God, shall never die. But the many that make up that one are frail, erring souls, who are open to attack at this point and that. The enemy will make war against the seed of the woman in detail. He will divide; and, perchance, then he may conquer. These have been his tactics, and are still. And, alas! too often they have seemed to be successful. There Peter falls grievously; and Judas, in desperation, goes to his own place. Here, upon the rocks, lies Demas, who has forsaken the good way, having loved this present world. It is a sorrowful story that is here hinted at in these last words of the chapter. They point to the long line of those who once ran well and then were hindered. I have not seen as much of life as some of you, but I have seen enough to wring my heart with sorrow. I have seen those who once stood among the champions of the Cross, who took their place in the ranks of our teachers, whose voices were heard and heard with pleasure at our meetings for prayer: I have seen them fall before the wiles of the enemy. Some secret sin gradually gained ascendancy, and they grew more and more infatuated. It was easy to glide down the steep, and downward they went. Prayer was abandoned; one link to goodness after another was snapped. Ah me! it was sad to see the wreck floating on the stream to the dark ocean beyond. Character, happiness, usefulness, all life's greatest prizes gone! I could but hope that our merciful Lord would find more beneath the ruins than man could see. I have turned me away mournfully at the sight, with the prayer rising from my heart, "Hold Thou me up, so shall I be safe."

Brethren, there are those who point to these fallen ones with a smile on the lip, and a meaning we cannot mistake. Let us rather learn another lesson. Let us rather say, If these have fallen, who may presume that he will always stand? If these have fallen, how strong the tide, how fierce

the danger! "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Be sober, be vigilant, and watch unto prayer;

"There is much need; for not as yet
Are we in shelter or repose;
The holy house is still beset
With leaguer of stern foes;
Wild thoughts within, bad men without,
All evil spirits round about,
Are banded in unblest device,
To spoil Love's earthly paradise.

Then draw we nearer day by day,
Each to his brethren, all to God;
Let the world take us as she may,
We must not change our road;
Not wondering, though in grief, to find
The martyr's foe still keep her mind;
But fixed to hold Love's banner fast,
And, by submission, win at last."

VI.

THE TWO BEASTS AND THE IMAGE.

REVELATION xiii.

STILL in the spirit is the apostle, and still in heaven. But at this point the vision embraces in its scenery the restless ocean, as he had seen it many a time round that isle of Patmos. While he looks on, there rises out of the deep a beast, a monstrous shape, having seven heads and ten horns. Upon each horn there is a crown, denoting dominion, and upon each head the name blasphemy. This beast has the panther's form, with the paws of the bear, and a lion's mouth. I have no doubt that in its peculiar shape we have a reference to the symbolism of the Book of Daniel. Already have we seen that the desolation which Antiochus inflicted upon the temple and city of Jerusalem is used in the visions of the Revelation to typify future ravages of evil upon the Church of God. A definite historical event was predicted by Daniel, and it became the foundation of an indefinite foreshadowing of evil in the visions of John. In the chapter before us we have another instance of the same kind. Daniel saw the Babylonian power under the similitude of a lion, the Medo-Persian empire under the similitude of a bear; the kingdom of Alexander the Great was represented by a leopard or panther, while Alexander's successors were described under the figure of a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly. This fourth was diverse from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. These beasts foreshadowed ruling powers of the earth, and they are brought into prominence simply because they would oppress the Hebrew nation, the chosen people of God. It is matter of history now, that, in the order given, these empires did arise and dominate over the

land of Israel. Stretching from Nebuchadnezzar to Antiochus Epiphanes, as these visions of Daniel did, they received their fulfilment in actual Jewish history. Again, therefore,—as before, in the case of Antiochus,—in John's vision, the symbol of the ruling powers of the earth, as arrayed against the Church of God, takes up the figures of Daniel's prophecy, and fuses them together. We have, in this one beast of the Revelation, the different characteristics of all the four that Daniel saw. It has the leopard's form, the paws of the bear, the lion's mouth, and the ten horns. It is, therefore, not the symbol of any one king or power, but of all kings and powers, in so far as they rise up to persecute the Church of God, in any age, and in any land whatsoever. In the seventh verse of this thirteenth chapter, it is said that it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him *over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations*. Clearly there is here no merely single, local reference to this or that king or nation, but an all-comprehensive symbol, descriptive of hostile civil persecuting powers everywhere. It points to that interference of the civil ruler in the realm of conscience, which is utterly without warrant; for

“Consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord's alone.”

This unlawful intrusion, on the part of the temporal power, is animated by the spirit of evil; for the dragon gave to this beast his power, and his throne, and great authority. John saw that one of its heads was, as it were, wounded to death; and its deadly wound was healed. For already, in vision, he had seen the destruction of the apostate Jewish power which had persecuted the Church. But, though this power was broken, civil rulers in other ages and in other lands also would persecute the Church. The deadly wound of the beast was healed; still should the kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Christ. The usurpation by the temporal power should have its limited time of ascendancy, even as heathenism was seen to have. Power was given to the beast to continue forty and two months. “And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His

name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven." For when kings and rulers step out of their lawful province, and take upon themselves to dictate the religious belief of their subjects, they are invading rights that belong only to the King of kings. It is theirs to cast the protection of the state over all their subjects alike, so long as the civil laws are obeyed. Standing before the law, no man should receive either favour or disfavour because of his religious opinions. To determine by state enactment what is false in religion, and what is true; to seek to put down by force that which a God-fearing man believes the Spirit has taught him, is to do a perilous thing. For, as Milton has said, "If it comes to prohibiting, there is not aught more likely to be prohibited than truth itself, whose first appearance to our eyes, blurred and dimmed with prejudice and custom, is more unsightly and unpalatable than many errors." The kings and governors of nations may be, and often are, utterly unspiritual men; and when they proceed to determine matters of conscience, to use force where conviction alone can prevail, to deal compulsorily with the sacred thoughts and feelings that are between the soul and its Maker, then do they rush with unhallowed step into a region where no mortal has a right, where even angels fear to tread. They encroach upon the high prerogatives of Him, before whose judgment-bar even kings themselves are amenable. Interference with conscience is a sin against man, it is a greater sin against God. In these solemn words is that sin described: "He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle,"—for man's soul is the temple of God—"and them that dwell in heaven."

Yet, blasphemous as worldly power arrayed against the conscience is held to be in heaven, there are multitudes who are bewitched by it on earth. "All the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon, which gave power unto the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?" The sycophants and time-servers, the men who go with the stream, the men with whom a little temporal good is infinitely preferable to the richest spiritual blessing, the men who have no conscientious convictions of their own, are always ready

ravages of the beast that rose out of the sea in the visions of John. There were the Waldenses in the valleys of Piedmont, whose awful sufferings for conscience' sake, from generation to generation, led our own Milton to pray,—

“Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them, who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundred-fold, who, having learned Thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Who can think without a shudder of the dread cruelties of that which, in bitter irony surely, was called the Holy Inquisition? Or who does not blush for our common humanity, as he recalls the atrocities the power of Spain perpetrated in the Netherlands, in the sacred name of Jesus? It was avowedly on a religious errand that that fiendish wretch, the Duke of Alva, went through the land, leaving nothing but tears and blood, execration and desolation behind him. It was in the supposed interests of the Christian faith that the civil power lit the fires of Smithfield, and sent through the flames to their martyr's crown, a Latimer, a Ridley, and a host of others of whom the world was not worthy. Two centuries ago, it held John Bunyan in Bedford jail for twelve weary years. It sent two thousand of the noblest preachers England ever had, to want and poverty. By Conventicle Acts and Five Mile Acts, it harassed them still more. It sent good men by hundreds to rot in jail, or to die as transported felons in the plantations of Virginia. These things it has done; and, though the spirit of our times forbids a repetition of the grosser forms of evil, yet the interference of the civil power in matters that are spiritual, is and ever must be most mischievous. Those who see not with us, would deprecate, I am sure, as much as we should, a return to the violence of the past. Yet we are by no means free to-day from the evils produced by the beast that rose from the abyss, as John stood by the sea. There has never been a session of Parliament within my memory, without a religious struggle between two great parties in

the nation. A dominant Church, rendered unreasoning by her connection with the State, has resolutely striven to fix or fasten, on the necks of those who could not conscientiously conform, some irritating badge of inferiority. Impatient tolerance has been supposed to be a proof of generosity, when religious equality was the righteous claim of justice. And if those who are without the pale of the Church established by law have suffered indignity and exclusion from national rights, that Church herself also has suffered grievously from the same cause. Hampered with golden fetters, she has been often and painfully embarrassed by a position for which she finds no warrant in the word of God. In ways innumerable, her most faithful sons are more and more beginning to feel this. The rising tide of spiritual life in the Church is fretting and dashing against the barriers to her freedom on every side. And they are not violent and revolutionary, but her most faithful friends, who would seek to free her from the trammels of the State. Grand as her work has been, it will be grander still when she goes forth owning no allegiance but that to her risen Lord and Head. The principles for which our Nonconformist fathers contended, on purely spiritual grounds, are rising marvellously into the ascendant with the foremost statesmen of our time, on grounds entirely independent of these. But while we may fairly prove our case on the historical and philosophical basis, we prefer to keep to the simple testimony of our fathers. Theirs were spiritual reasons, so are ours. We maintain that the laws of the Saviour for His kingdom are sole and sufficient—that the mighty truths of the Book of God, and the great verities of the Unseen, are most powerful when they come down in all their simple, native grandeur upon the hearts and consciences of men. God's truth and God's Spirit need no help from the princes of this world, save that which they can render in common with all Christians by a holy life. Other help only embarrasses and hinders. It is as Saul's armour to David; and the stripling can slay the giant of evil more readily with the simple stone slung by the hand of faith. "If any man have an ear, let him hear."

Again the vision of the apostle proceeds. A second beast rises up, this time from the earth. He has two horns

like a lamb, but he spake as a dragon. He is outwardly meek, but inwardly ravenous. By false representations and deceitful signs, "he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast." This is the symbol of every form of religious deception, and especially of a *corrupt ministry or priesthood*. A moment's reflection will show that great evils have arisen from this source also. Very early there began to be departures from the simplicity of the faith. A priesthood, allied with worldly states, became worldly in itself. It received honours and grandeur from the civil power, and in return it gave support to all the measures which that civil power adopted. Not in bitterness, but in sorrow, let us call to mind that Satan has often turned the ministry of the gospel, which was set for the guidance of men's souls, into the instrument of their deception. Ceremonies and sacraments have been substituted for true spiritual religion in the heart. And this falls in with the current of man's nature. Even under a ministry that speaks out faithfully, how prone men are to substitute outward forms for inward life. It is very difficult, under the most favourable circumstances, for these weak hearts of ours to realize that God is a Spirit, and that they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. How serious then may we expect the results to be, when the guides themselves are deceived and deceiving! If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch? If we turn back over the centuries of the Christian era, we see traces on every side of the desolations thus occasioned. Human inventions have taken the place of Divine appointments. The sacraments have been put in the place of the Saviour. The simple truth of God has been overlaid by empty forms and ceremonies. Thus its healthful power has been withdrawn, and human pride and passion have run riot in the Church of God. Another gospel has been proclaimed, which is yet not another. The truest life, the truest Church, has often been found outside that Church which claimed to keep the power over men's souls. The most earnest Christians have too often been those who were compelled to turn round and face the stream, commencing a reaction which had for its purpose a

return to the central source of truth. The evils arising from false teaching have not been confined to one Church. It is not sufficient to say that the book of Revelation denounces Romanism. It does denounce that most surely. It is in that communion that superstition has been developed in its darkest shapes. But it denounces corruption by whatever name it is known. This book sets forth as the enemy of God everywhere that false teaching which puts human errors in the place of God's truth. The second beast has risen up in England as well as in Rome. When I point with sorrow to the extraordinary growth of Popish practices in the English Church, I know that my sorrow is shared deeply by many holy and devout men who love that Church and remain in her communion, bitterly deploring that which they cannot deny. Who that loves the gospel can look without concern at the rapid strides which empty ceremonialism has made in this land, where the blood of Protestant martyrs has been shed? I know the ground taken by those clergymen, now to be counted by thousands, whose avowed object it is to set up a pompous ritual in the churches of England. I am not insensible to the lofty thought of a one holy catholic and apostolic Church, but I am certain it is not found where they are seeking it. I know what they say about the decent observance of Divine worship, and their principle I admit; but their practices I denounce. That which they are seeking to set up is not worship. It is the merest sensationalism, which will deprave the taste rather than elevate it. These emblazoned banners, this smoking incense, these lighted candles in broad day, this priestly millinery of alb, chasuble, dalmatic, and the rest of it, what is it all but the merest trumpery in His sight who seeks the contrite heart as His chosen temple? If He had desired this sort of thing, He would have told us so. But where is the warrant for all these gauds and pomps in the written word? The worship of God is degraded to a theatrical spectacle, and men are invited to church as to an entertainment. Christian verities are referred to, it is true; but the great attractions are the processions, the incense, the music, the decorations, the dresses, and the mummeries of these men who call themselves priests. Baptismal regeneration is taught in its strongest

form, the doctrine of the real presence is openly declared, and the people taught to bow at the elevation of the host. Rapturous hymns are composed in honour of the Virgin. The name of Protestant is spoken of with bitterest contempt, and it is hard to know wherein these men do really differ from the Church of Rome. There is about them the pretence of great learning, and their ecclesiastical jargon is almost endless. But their learning is as remote from New Testament teaching, as the empty disputes of the schoolmen were from common sense. What all this will come to it is very hard to say. What it has come to in past ages, the world knows too well. For it is not a new thing in the earth. Europe has already groaned beneath this corruption. By their fruits ye shall know them; and what has this sensuous ritualism done in the past? It has raised up and aggrandized a proud and worldly priesthood; it has led to traffic with the souls of men; it has thrust out of men's hands and hearts the word of God, and given them traditions and superstitions in its place. It has raised up men to fraternize with tyrants, and to conspire against the civil and religious liberties of the nations. Through a long night some of the nations have been groaning in bondage, and envying the liberty which we enjoyed, and which the word of God has given to us. While here among us, these benighted men, on the other hand, dealing with a generation who undervalue liberty because they have not had to fight for it, would have us abandon that liberty, and go back into the darkness of the past. One thing is very certain to my mind: if priestcraft thus goes on to captivate the people, the word of God will have to go; and if that goes, our religious liberty will go too, and when religious liberty falls civil liberty falls with it. If there be a successful reaction in favour of priestcraft, there will follow an equally successful reaction in favour of despotism. In native darkness they flourish together. It may seem improbable now that our political liberties will be shaken. Twenty years ago, it seemed equally improbable that there would be the sacrifice of the mass in the Protestant churches of the land. Yet we have lived to see that. What the next twenty years may develop, it is hard to say. This generation has grown up mainly under Protestant teaching; the

next generation is growing up, surrounded by all these mummeries of superstition. There will be less and less resistance. What are mere tendencies now will be developed courses of action then. The poisonous fruit is ripening, but not yet ripe. No spurious charity should prevent our speaking out on this matter. Because the men who put forth error are amiable and excellent in private life, error is not less deadly, but often more. Their very excellence often finds for that error a passport to the hearts of those who would repel it if it came from an open enemy. Misdirection, as to the way of life, will be ruinous in its results, come from whence it may. They are not the words of a narrow-minded sectarian, but of an inspired apostle, which runs thus:—"There be some that trouble you, and which pervert the gospel of Christ. But, though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He reiterates, that he may impress:—"As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

On turning again to the chapter before us, we read further of the doings of the second beast—"He doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast." We have here, of course, a reference to those pretended miracles by which priestcraft has, in past ages, gained an ascendancy over men's minds. Its "coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Priestcraft also says, "to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the first beast," or worldly persecuting power. "And it had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." With great propriety, as it seems to me, this image has been taken as a representation of corrupt public opinion,

the nearest resemblance that exists to a corrupt civil government. In both cases, the fear of man leads some to defer to their power, even when they support the wrong. We all feel the pressure of the opinion around us. It may and often does affect men more than the civil power can. A persecuting ruler may now and then single out from the community a man or a body of men, and then there will come intervals, when, from weariness or carelessness, he will cease from oppression. But there slowly grows up a power in the community, the power of public opinion, that is always at work. This shapes men more than they are aware. It is often more tyrannical in its demands than even kings themselves. It is an image of the first beast; and the second beast—that is false teaching—causes it to speak, gives it power and force. We may take the meaning of this image in its widest sense, as including whatever is believed around us contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture. In every community there grow up opinions and usages that have their foundation in the maxims of men rather than in the truth of God. In every Church there is an admixture of human error, in practice and doctrine. And one of the bravest things a man can do, is to resist this, when it is found in his own party. Custom and fashion demand many things of us. Some of these demands are trifling and unimportant, and it is no great matter whether we yield or resist. But this is not the case with all. Grievously wrong things are sometimes done for no better reason than that others do them. And it is always easier to go with the stream than against it. Yet, if we would be true men and hold our liberty, there are occasions when we must turn round and breast that stream. It has been said by a clear and vigorous thinker of our own times,* “Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived, that when society is itself the tyrant—society collectively—over the separate individuals who compose it, its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its public functionaries. Society

* John Stuart Mill.

can and does execute its own mandates ; and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression ; since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough : there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling ; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them ; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence ; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism."

Public opinion then may become a powerful image of the first beast. A man may find it very hard to withstand this, when he has resisted that. And if he does, he suffers for his hardihood. The second beast "causes that as many as would not worship the image of the first beast should be killed." This may be literally true in extreme cases. But a man may suffer very grievously even when his life is not taken away. His reputation may be slain, as well as his life ; and his prospects may be blasted, even though he be not thrust into jail. "And he caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads : and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." This is plain enough ; or if explanation is necessary, it is given when a man is refused a farm or turned out of one, because of his conscientious convictions ; or when his business suffers, and he may not buy or sell freely, because it is known that he thinks differently from the majority of those around him.

But it requires discernment and insight to distinguish the false from the true. The worse is often made to appear the better reason. Satan appears not unfrequently as an angel of light; therefore it becomes us to take counsel continually at the oracles of the living God. Men may be worldly hearted in various degrees. The worship of the god of this world, by some men, is as plain to see as the mark which the Hindoo paints on his forehead, to denote the idol he has taken for his god. But other men are not so open; the mark, or the number of the name of the beast, is in the hand rather than on the forehead, and therefore not so manifest, though it is there. It is added, "Here is wisdom," herein a man shows whether he walks in darkness or in light. "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man." It is within the power of a man to find it out, to separate the chaff from the wheat, if he is resolved to do it. "And his number is six hundred three-score and six." We here come to a difficulty, the solutions of which have been legion. Without entering upon these at large, let me put before you an explanation which is a very old one, if not the oldest of all.

Throughout the writings of the apostles there runs an undertone of warning to the Christian men of that generation. It was again and again intimated that there would rise up an antichrist more formidable than any that had yet appeared—more formidable than Judaism or heathenism, because more subtle and deceptive. That enemy was called the mystery of iniquity, and already had it begun to work in the days of the apostles. Every man had need to be on his guard, lest he be overcome by the insidious foe. We beseech you, brethren, by the most solemn considerations, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him. Let no man deceive you by any means. The end is not yet. It will not come until there has been developed the most blasphemous form of antichrist. The evil has begun; for the mystery of iniquity doth already work. It shall be an evil that arises from assumptions of power, where God alone ought to rule. They who have no right will sit in the temple of God. The coming is after the working of Satan with all power

and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. The victims of this evil shall be under strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, for they had pleasure in unrighteousness. These significant hints are pressed home again and again, both by letters and the living voice. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told ye these things? It is almost impossible to overlook these references to latent dangers, and to the mystery of iniquity, when we read in this book (xvii. 5) that John saw a wanton harlot sitting upon the scarlet coloured beast, and upon her forehead was a name written, "Mystery." We shall see hereafter that, under the double figure of a city and an abandoned woman, we have in this the representation of the entire community of those who worship the beast, as distinguished from those who follow the Lamb. The name upon her forehead we have just seen is "Mystery." The corresponding word in Hebrew is "S'thur," the secret, the hidden. Now the Hebrew letters, like the Greek and Roman, are used as numerals, and the letters in the word "S'thur," together, make up the number 666. In a book where there are such strong Hebraistic elements in language, thought, and symbols, I am not surprised to find such a mystic reference to an equivalent Hebrew word. When it is said the number of the beast is six hundred three-score and six, the meaning seems to be this:—You have been prepared for a portentous form of evil. That form is embodied in her upon whose forehead is the name "Mystery." But she is only an aggregate symbol, representing all those who worship the beast. Whoever renders that homage to force and fraud, which belongs only to right and truth, is part of the mystical Babylon. The number of the name belongs to him. It may be found written on his hand, or engraven on his forehead. He, too, belongs to the kingdom of darkness or secrecy. God sees the sign that identifies him with Babylon. And men may find out the name, too, and its number, "for it is the number of a man." It is within the reach of human insight to distinguish and separate. If we are right, then, this mysterious language is meant to set us on our guard, to lead us to be diligent in self-examination, lest we too be deceived, worshipping force and fraud

rather than the living God. Times have changed, and each new generation sees different phases of life. But while the form has changed, the spirit of evil and worldly compliance is unchanged. The warning voice is not unneeded. Still, as of old, men are striving to serve two masters—God and mammon ; but still, as of old, their service is irreconcilable. The solemn question of our Lord has lost none of its significance. “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

VII.

THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE.

REVELATION xiv.

THUS far we have been called to look at the darker side of the Church's history. But happily there is another side. Knowing the malice and craft of Satan, the pressure of the ruling worldly power, and the insidious effects of false teaching and corrupt public opinion, we might fear that the faithful would be few indeed. Belief is often determined by what is fashionable, or politic, or pleasant, rather than by what is true or spiritual. It is not every man that looks beneath the surface, and tests the opinions and practices of his time by the law and the testimony. It is not every man that prefers reality to appearance, the things that are unseen and eternal to the things which are seen and temporal. To do this demands earnestness of search and firmness of conviction, and therefore the crowd chooses the broader and easier path. Still, notwithstanding these unfavourable influences, God has had His own faithful followers, even in the darkest times. The gallant spirit of Elijah broke down in the day of desertion and disappointment, from forgetting this. He thought his life had been a failure and a mistake, and that he had struggled in vain against the wickedness and folly of his countrymen: "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left." Poor troubled heart, thus uttering some of the most sorrowful words history ever recorded! so it seems, but so it is not. Deep down in the heart of the nation, hidden away in the caves of Carmel, are seven thousand who have never bowed the knee to Baal. There are two sides to the kingdom of God, and we

in our despondency may see only one. We may realize the significance of the previous visions: we may behold Satan struggling might and main against the Church of the living God; the civil power of kings arrayed against the faithful; false teaching supported by State influence, and working on to the deception of men's souls; perverted public opinion, seeking with its hundred hands to drag down truth and righteousness, and with its hundred tongues to assail the reputation of those who feel that, come what may, they must obey God rather than man: we may see all this, and the view is disheartening enough. But there is another side on which to look, and the aspect is truly inspiring. John saw the multitude both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, with the mark of the beast in their right hands, or on their foreheads. But now a new vision sets forth the brighter side: "I looked, and lo!"—a very consolatory spectacle. On the mount Zion, the typical place of Divine service and manifestation, he saw the Lamb, the risen Redeemer and Head of the Church; and with Him a hundred and forty and four thousand, the faithful found among the faithless. They had kept themselves free from the mark of the beast. They had preserved their loyalty and fidelity to the King of kings. They had the Lamb's name (for such is the best reading), and the Father's name written on their foreheads. Rich and poor, small and great, bond and free, have yielded to the force or the blandishments of the beasts and the image; but these hundred and forty and four thousand have gone through the world's Vanity-fair with that heavenly name plainly manifest. The pressure against them was keen and strong, yet they remained incorrupted and incorruptible. He who stood with them in glory on mount Zion, had been with them in conflict upon the earth. Their Lord was with them; therefore they were in a great majority, though all kings, and priests, and peoples were against them; and here they stand, having triumphed through Him.

In their number we see a reference to the first vision. You will remember, that before the final ruin fell on Jerusalem, a hundred and forty-four thousand were sealed out of every tribe of Israel and saved. They were the

spiritual Israel in the midst of the apostate Jewish nation, and God watched over and kept them as the apple of His eye. Now in this chapter they appear again, and as part of a different vision. Here they are regarded, not so much in relation to the nation to which by birth they belonged, and from the wreck of which they were saved, but rather as the first-fruits of the entire Church of Christ; that Church in which all distinctions between Jew and Gentile are done away for ever. They stand upon mount Zion as the pledge and assurance of all those who in every age and land shall be faithful to principle and to God. In olden time the Hebrews took of the first-fruits of their land, and offered them unto God. The offering on their part was a token of thanksgiving; the reception on His part was a pledge that the rest of the harvest should be gathered. A sheaf was carried to the temple, to mount Zion, and there waved before the Lord. Then, and not till then, the harvest might be gathered. What that first sheaf waved before the Lord was to the rest of the harvest, these one hundred and forty-four thousand are to the rest of the faithful, who shall be found in every generation, even to the end. They are therefore representative men; representative of a multitude which no man can number. "These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb."

Here they are in vision before the throne of God, in the midst of the scene which John beheld at the beginning of his visions; the throne, and the elders, and the living creatures, symbolic of man's perfected powers. They are there in triumph, and whatsoever triumphs sings. They sing a new song, the song of redemption by the blood of Christ. They are the first-fruits of those redeemed from among men, and therefore the first to utter the praise that comes from souls redeemed. John heard their song, as it rose with mighty swell in that heavenly world. So rich and full was it, that it seemed like the voice of many waters leaping from rock to rock of some lofty cascade; so majestic was it, that it reminded John of the thunder as it reverberates among the mountains; yet so sweet withal, that the sound was as of harpers harping on their harps. It was a new song; the theme, the joy was new.

Angels, standing there in that bright presence, could not enter into all the fulness of its rapture. None can feel the joys of deliverance, like those who have been drawn from the burning house or rescued from the sinking ship; and no man could learn that song but those who had been lifted by the strong hand of a Saviour out of sin and death into eternal life. Angels had bent with songs of joy over the manger of Bethlehem, and with wondering awe over the cross of Calvary. Into the mysteries of redemption they had desired to look. Yet this new song was not for them. It could rise only from the lips of men, who had once been rebels but had been received as sons, who were once nigh unto perishing, but they "were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

These redeemed ones have kept themselves from spiritual adulteries. They were obedient to the heavenly voice, and followed the Lamb whithersoever He went. They followed their Lord in spirit, in life; striving to be like Him in patience, devotion, and generous love to the lost. They followed the Lamb whithersoever He went. It has been well said, "Some of us are willing, it may be, to follow the Lamb a certain way, or in a certain direction. There are some things which He requires of us which we are willing to give. A gentle temper is ready to yield meekness; a vigorous frame is ready to give diligence. But try the gentle temper, by proposing to it some work of courage; try the vigorous frame, by laying upon it not something to be done, but something to be suffered, some task of irksome charity, or some season of wasting sickness; and, perhaps, you will find that the word *whithersoever* has applied a test fatal to many professions and severely trying to all." But though the path of the Christian disciple is steep, yet it is so because it leads to the heavenly heights. They that follow the Lamb in suffering shall also follow Him in joy. Whithersoever amid the glories of eternity the Lamb goeth, they shall follow Him. In the expressive language of Scripture, they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

This triumphant scene, where our ears are filled with songs of victory, is meant to be set over against the sor-

rows which faithful conscientious men endure, when they refuse to bear the mark of the beast or the number of his name. The world has its victories and its enjoyments; but so has the faithful soul. The easy and compliant and unprincipled gain their ends, and verily they have their reward. They bear the mark, and therefore can buy and sell and have the good things of the present. But these are short-lived. On the other hand, he who follows His Lord whithersoever He goeth, through scorn and sorrow and suffering, meekly bearing the appointed cross, has joys of which the world knows nothing. He will not bow the knee to the god of this world; he will not give to man what belongs only to the Lord of lords; and he has to face the consequences of resistance. But he has also his compensations. A peaceful conscience, the approving smile of his Father, the abiding presence of his Saviour—these are more than the worldling's treasures. And they are only the beginning of good things. He shall stand before the throne, and strike the harp, and raise the song of victory. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

So far, then, we are permitted to look at some of the issues of the conflict with the dragon, and with the beasts animated by the spirit of the dragon. Some will be overborne; but others will continue faithful unto death, and receive the crown of life. And now a further thought opens before us. God's kingdom shall not only hold its own, but shall spread. The Divine purposes shall march on to their completion, though the gates of hell resist. At this point the apostle sees "another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." This angel represents to us all those servants of the Lord who go forth to sow the good seed of the kingdom. Every minister who preaches at home, every missionary who labours abroad, every Sunday-school teacher who gathers the young to his side and speaks to them of Jesus, every Christian that stops to tell his neighbour about the love of Christ; the pulpit, the press, the friendly word, the friendly letter, every agency

that man's ingenuity may devise, and God's blessing follow—all are symbolised by the angel flying through the midst of the heaven. He is a messenger sent of God, and his message is glad tidings, the everlasting gospel. It is gospel, having for its burden the news that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life; that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses. It is a *gospel* in very deed and truth, proclaiming glad tidings of atonement, forgiveness, renewal, and complete redemption. It is the *everlasting* gospel. It shall outlive every form of opposition. The sword cannot cut it in sunder, the fire cannot burn it, the waters cannot drown it. It will shake off iron fetters, and fly through prison walls. The frown of the tyrant, the laugh of the frivolous, the sneer of the sceptic are alike powerless to stay its course. It seems to go back sometimes, but only as the waves of the on-coming tide go back when preparing to rise higher than before. Its friends die; but it lives on. The first disciples bound it to their hearts, and spread it as with the tongue of fire; they departed to their rest nearly eighteen centuries ago, but the gospel is here to-day, the glory and joy of more souls than ever. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word of good shall not pass away. All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you:

“Our little systems have their day—
They have their day, and cease to be;”

but God's message of love is needed by every age alike, and to every age it comes. It is for them—all them—that dwell on the earth. “Power was given” unto the beast “over all kindreds and tongues and nations.” And the remedy shall reach as far as the disease. The angel flies through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

But the first note of that gospel is one of alarm and warning. The world is summoned to repent as well as

believe. We fear before we hope. The gospel proclaims the love of God to a sinful world ; it also declares the danger of going as that world goes. The angel cries with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to Him ; for the hour of His judgment is come ; and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." When Christ is lifted up, the judgment of the prince of this world begins. The drawing and the casting out proceed in parallel lines. The Judge of quick and dead is no unconcerned spectator ; even here and now the judgment goes forward, the hour of His judgment is come. So declares the first angel. Then follows the second angel, with the cry, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." And the third angel followed these two, and with a loud voice he cried, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out unmixed, undiluted, in the cup of His indignation ; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb : and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." They who gave up so much, from fear of man, find there is another fear beyond—the fear of Him who can cast both body and soul into hell. "And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints : here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

In the cry of the second angel we come to a point requiring a moment's consideration before we proceed, although it will come before us again hereafter. Babylon here referred to has usually been interpreted in a figurative sense. I suppose no one refers it to the actual city of Babylon on the river Euphrates, for that had fallen long before the time of these visions. It is very commonly taken to mean Rome, some applying it to ancient heathen Rome, and some to modern papal Rome. It certainly applies to modern papal Rome in so far as in that Church the force of civil power has been put forth to persecute,

in so far as false teaching has supported worldliness, and in so far as corrupt public opinion has perverted the minds of men from their obedience to God. I believe that all these evils have been manifested, grossly manifested, in that Church. But, unhappily, they have not been confined to it; and therefore we must give a wider interpretation to the meaning of mystical Babylon. It is the symbol of the entire community of those who worship worldly power and success, who put the fear of man in place of the fear of God, and walk by expediency rather than by principle. These are found everywhere in Christendom, and wherever they are found they are included in the community symbolised as Babylon the great.

Sometimes that community is known as Babylon, and sometimes as the great harlot, the mother of abominations. In the Old Testament, as well as in this book, both ideas are found together, as when the prophet cries, "How is the faithful city become a harlot!" This double figure, describing the same persons now under the similitude of a base woman and now under the similitude of a city, has its exact parallel in the way in which, on the other hand, the followers of the Lamb are spoken of. Frequently the sacred writers speak of all believers together under the figure of a bride. The apostle, referring to the closeness of the marriage relation, says, This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. The future coming together of the Saviour and His redeemed ones is compared to a bridal. Whenever two plight their troth together at God's altar, surrounded by the interest and good wishes of those who look on at their espousals, we have a foreshadowing in human relations of that bright bridal day when Christ shall present all the saved to Himself—He the bridegroom, and they the bride; a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Very often, I need not say, the Church is represented under the figure of a chaste bride: she is also represented under the figure of a city. And what I wish especially to point out is the fact that both these figures are blended together in one passage. In the twenty-first chapter of this book (verses 9 and 10), John says, "There came unto me one of the seven angels, which had the seven vials full of

the seven last plagues, and talked with me saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Yet, while offering to show the apostle the bride, the Lamb's wife, he did actually show him a city. Mark what follows: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." So he proceeds to describe a city with walls and gates and golden streets. It is plain that the two symbols mean one and the same thing. There can be no doubt that the bride, the Lamb's wife, means the collective Church of the redeemed; and there can be as little doubt that the bride and the city here described are one and the same.

Now, as the entire company of the faithful are thus set forth under the double figure of a chaste bride and a holy city, so also the entire company of those who worship worldly power and success, and are the dupes of false teaching and corrupt public opinion, are set forth under the double figure of a wanton harlot and a wicked city. Remembering this, and returning to the chapter before us, we read it thus—The first angel, having the everlasting gospel, announces also that judgment is declared as well as mercy. The second angel declares that that judgment is to fall upon Babylon. And the third angel explains this by saying that judgment falls upon any and every man who worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark in his forehead or in his hand. Though the immediate results of worldly compliance seem to be pleasant, they are of short duration. The man wins the world, but loses his soul. He shall drink of the wine of the wrath which is poured out, undiluted, into the cup of indignation. He shall suffer even in this world; and the spiritual sorrows of the world to come shall be as when the body is tormented with fire and brimstone. And these sufferings shall be intensified, because endured in the presence of the holy angels, who would have rejoiced over his repentance, and in the presence of the Lamb, who died to save the world, and offered salvation freely to him. "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest;" they who sacrificed principle and conscience to ease and comfort: "they have no rest day nor

night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." Such is the close of the solemn warning, intensified more and more as one angel after another takes up the burden of Divine judgments.

And now we are to turn to those who are faithful to God in successive generations. Already, at the beginning of the chapter, have we seen the first-fruits of the Church, on mount Zion, raising their song of triumph. But we have been told nothing yet of those who should come after them, of those who should hold on their way during the forty and two months of darkness and conflict. It is to these therefore our thoughts are turned, when John says, "Here is the patience of the saints, here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Their constancy may be tried, their principles may be ridiculed, their sorrows may be multiplied; but it shall not always be thus with them. The night may be long, but the morning cometh. Time is but the threshold of eternity. Success and failure may be reversed when the light of the future is thrown upon them. The end is not yet; but when it comes, and we have the full materials for judgment, it will be seen that uncompromising fidelity to principle and to God is the only path to enduring honour and undying blessedness. For the apostle goes on to say, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Twelve times in the course of this book is the apostle commanded to write that which he hears and sees, and each time it is something of deeper interest than ordinary, to which attention is thus specially called. The command is also solemnly endorsed by the Holy Ghost—"Yea, saith the Spirit." Let this be known wherever the gospel of the kingdom is preached: blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Blessed from henceforth. There will be no long night of gloomy unconsciousness. To die is gain. To depart, and to be with Christ, is far better. When the eye has gazed its last fond look, and the heart given its last throb, from henceforth blessed are they. They rest from their labours. From the fretting, anxious toils of life, from the wear and tear of doubt and fear, from disappointment and fruitless labour frustrate of its hope,

from all that gives the lines of care to the face and the feeling of sadness to the heart: from all this they rest. They leave behind them the briers and thorns, they bear with them their imperishable treasures. Their works do follow them. Our Lord is a gracious Master; He gives strength for service, and crowns that service with blessing. That which is done in His name, though it be but the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple, shall in no wise lose its reward. They who serve God with fidelity are always garnering up treasure for that world where no destructive influence can touch it. They are always radiating an influence for good. That which is the deepest principle within a man must of necessity breathe forth. They are, therefore, evermore working their lives for good into the lives of others; and, long after they have reached home themselves, their works do follow them.

After these words had been spoken—words which have long been a sacred possession to Christian mourners weeping over their dead—words which, times without number, have been uttered over the pallid face and written on the tomb—after hearing these, John beheld a striking symbolic description of the gathering in of successive generations of faithful men. Already have we seen, I must again remind you, those standing with the Lamb on mount Zion who were the first-fruits of the harvest. We now see the harvest itself in course of reaping. From generation to generation the Lord is gathering the wheat into His garner. From age to age there are those who are brought to their Father's house, like as a shock of corn cometh in in its season. "I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown and in His hand a sharp sickle." He holds the keys of death and the grave; on His head is the crown, symbol of His sovereignty over the unseen world. But still He works in harmony with the Father's will; therefore we are told that a messenger came out from the innermost sanctuary, crying to Him that sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped." There is a beautiful thought

here which we must not overlook. The Saviour Himself gathers in His own. The Reaper of the wheat is the Son of man. It was the Saviour whom Stephen saw, when in dying agony he looked upward: He was standing at the right hand of God, as though He had risen to welcome His servant as soon as the last enemy had done his work. Blessed token this, that all His people shall find Him near in the hour when heart and flesh are failing. When the shadows thicken, when the feet set forth on the unknown journey, then is He the nearest to His own. At sight of Him all fear departs; and they go, singing as they go, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they shall comfort me.

But there is another ingathering. Out of the temple, the very sanctuary of God's presence, comes a second angel having a sharp sickle in his hand. He is met by an angel who comes out from beneath the altar as the minister of wrath, for he has power over fire, and he cries with a loud cry to Him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in Thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. The angel obeyed the command, gathering the vine of the earth, and casting it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. "And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even to the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs."

An explanatory word is needful here. The length mentioned—1600 furlongs, or rather 1600 stadia (for this is the right word), a stadium being rather shorter than a furlong—is a little more than 180 miles, and this is the length of Palestine from Dan to Beersheba. Now the land of Palestine is used as the symbol of the whole earth in some places, and is so used here. The expression in the last verse, therefore, is a symbolic way of saying that God's wrath shall be executed to the full over all the earth against His enemies. Wherever the beast has triumphed, there shall judgment come. But the city itself—the type of the heavenly city—must be kept undefiled as the place of life. Therefore is the winepress trodden without the city. The treading of the winepress is to be set over

against the reaping of the wheat. It is the appointed symbol of vengeance. "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." Again, "The Lord hath trodden the daughter of Judah as in a winepress." And again, "Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great."

Both sides have been placed before us. Look on this picture, and on that. There is a ripening of character, both for glory and for judgment. There is the sowing, the shooting up, the maturing. Side by side they grow; but at the end they are widely different. God gave to two men life, with all its grand possibilities, and said, "Occupy till I come; time is yours, eternity may be yours also." They went their way. The one man walked in softness and self-sparing. It was hard, battling against evil tendencies; and he gave it up. It was unpleasant, making sacrifices for truth and principle; and he would rather not make them. Christ's words about taking up the cross were a hard saying, and he could not hear them. So he crushed the better hope, stifled the holier voices, and destroyed the very strength of his manhood. Alas for the coming vintage! The time of the end appeared, and there was heard the voice of the angel crying unto his fellow, Thrust in Thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of this soul; for its grapes are fully ripe.

The other man went a different way. Caring more for righteousness than for comfort, struggling against the tide rather than going with it, he was bent on keeping his soul to life eternal. He followed his Lord to the judgment-hall, the garden, the cross, and the sepulchre. There was a steady growth of character, a ripening for the kingdom. Faith became stronger, and equal to the greater demands made upon it. Conscience became more tender. Love

steeped the soul to a richer mellowness, and communion with God filled the spirit with the fulness of God. Life had its shocks and storms, its biting winds and its beating tempests ; still the ripening went steadily forward, and at length the voice was heard as before, "Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap : for the time is come for Thee to reap : because the harvest of this soul is ripe."

Again I say, Look on this picture, and on that ; and may our good Lord bear home to your hearts the solemn lesson the contrast gives.

VIII.

THE SEVEN VIALS.

REVELATION XV., XVI.

WE have looked upon the harvest and the vintage of the earth. We have seen that the end of life proves the wisdom of the choice of God-fearing men. The righteous are gathered home, as the wheat is gathered into the garner; the worldly-minded give glory to God, as the vintage is made profitable by being crushed and broken. But not merely at life's end shall it be made apparent that the worship of worldly power, as opposed to the spiritual service of God, is destructive. Even here it works detrimentally to all the interests of man. This important truth the next vision unfolds to us. The apostle saw another sign in heaven, in that same palace of vision where already so many marvels had been witnessed. He saw seven angels having the seven last plagues; for with these the wrath of God was fulfilled.

Before the harvest and vintage, John saw the first-fruits of the faithful standing with the Lamb on mount Zion, where they sing, as it were, a new song before the throne. In like manner also, before the outpouring of the seven vials, he sees the triumph of all those who had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name. They have the harps of God; and standing, as did ancient Israel, by the shores of the sea, they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. It is not a song of victory, sung on mount Zion, and within the promised land, as was the last; it is raised while they have the wilderness yet to pass through; it is a song for earth, and not for heaven. A great deliverance is behind them, but long

wanderings are before them ere the borders of Canaan are reached.

There is frequent reference in this vision to the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and the mode of their deliverance from its yoke. There is very much in these two chapters that will become plainer to us if we bear in mind the position of God's people in that land, the judgments upon their oppressors, and the mighty deliverance wrought by Jehovah on their behalf. For example, when the first vial was out-poured, a grievous sore fell upon men, reminding us of the boils and blisters that formed one of the plagues of Egypt. The second vial was poured upon the sea, which became blood, as did all the streams and pools of Egypt at the smiting of Aaron's rod. The first-born of the Egyptians throughout the land were laid low by the destroying angel, and thus were the slaughtered sons of the Hebrews avenged; even as it is said when the third angel had poured out his vial, "They have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy." And once more, when the fifth angel had executed his commission, pouring out his vial upon the throne of the beast, his kingdom was full of darkness, reminding us of that darkness which was over all the land and which might be felt. It is, of course, quite in keeping with this, that at the outset of the vision John saw a sea of glass mingled with fire, symbol of the glittering purity and righteous judgments of God; and on the shore of this sea there stood those who had gotten the victory. And they had the harps of God, and they sang the song of Moses and of the Lamb. They rejoiced, as did the great lawgiver and the people of Israel, when, standing by the shore of that Red Sea where the flower of Egypt's strength had perished, they sang unto the Lord who had triumphed gloriously. This prominent reference to Egypt is worthy of note. Egypt was the type of the world-power that oppresses the spiritual Israel. So was Babylon; but there was a difference between Egypt and Babylon. Babylon came from afar against the chosen nation, and presents the ideal of an active, hostile force making inroads upon the Church. But Israel went down into Egypt, and Egypt's oppression comes from the surfeit of worldliness. It seeks to make

men content to be bondsmen, if only they can have the fleshpots and those other sensual indulgences the land yields so plenteously. It keeps its slaves at low, debasing pursuits, and robs them of the high aims of a true manhood. Yet, in spite of its tyranny, its spell is powerful. Even when God was in their midst, the manna all around, and Canaan before them, Israel hankered after Egypt again. It is the type of that world which holds out its bait to men, and tells them that high principle may be good, but comfort, easy-going, the gratification of the sense, these are better. It bids them be silent on topics that are unwelcome, to be supple and compliant, taking care of self, leaving principle to do the same. But the spiritual Israel know that the highest regard to principle is the truest care for self. They cannot stay in Egypt. Their hearts are weary of the gross fleshly delights of a life that rises but little above the sense. They thirst for the sight of God in His glory on the mountain summits of life. They would go forth and worship Him, though there be no fleshpots in the wilderness. Simpler and more severe the life there is, yet grander; and the end of it is Canaan. It is a great victory to break away from this Egypt in which we are all in danger of tarrying; and John sees those who have resolutely left it standing on the margin of their Red Sea of deliverance, singing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying—

“Great and awful are Thy works,
O Lord God the Almighty :
Just and faithful are Thy ways,
O Sovereign of the nations :
Who shall not fear, O Lord,
And give honour to Thy name ?
For Thou only art holy ;
For all nations shall come and worship before Thee,
For Thy righteous judgments are manifest.”

Thus they come out of Egypt, not with craven hearts that are ready to turn back, but with heroic feeling that bursts forth into song. As one has well said, “The Christian life, as it progresses, rises into song. For the essential principle of Christian life is self-surrendering love to God, and that can bring thanksgiving out of sorrow. Self-surrender

has not reached its highest form until a man can give up his all to God, and feel blessed even then because God's love is infinite. He has not learned to say 'Thy will be done' in the noblest sense, who says it only in sorrow. This is the test of a progressive life—a progressive spirit of song. Just as we go on conquering the evil that is in us, and evincing the heavenly spirit which strives for its conquest, shall we see how all life becomes musical with God's love. You see this in the Book of Psalms. It presents the truest picture of life in its falls, and its struggles, and its faithful struggling on after defeat. At first it tells of suffering and strife and sorrow; but as it draws to a close, the sorrow ceases, and it ends in one chant of praise. 'They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.' The dispensation of Moses and the dispensation of Christ—there is a ground of union between the men of all the ages, and they unite in one song. For the same spirit is against God which manifested itself to the men of the past: the same spirit of evil—in different shapes it may be—against which Moses, the prophets, and the faithful in the old time fought, has been confronting God's heroes through all the ages. Thus the one conflict of life makes the conquerors one in song."

When the song was ended, the apostle looked and behold the holy tabernacle of witness was opened in heaven, and there came out of the sanctuary the seven angels who held the seven last plagues. They came out of the innermost shrine; out of the place where stands the mercy-seat proceeds judgment. For judgment and mercy are one. Judgment is mercy in another form, and the overthrow of sin is tenderness. The Lord thy God is a jealous God—jealous because He loves. He would keep back evil from men and destroy it, as you would jealously keep a low-minded man from your child. There is nothing harsh in that. It is the highest form in which affection can show itself. You will not fail to mark that one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God. For perfected man fully acquiesces in the judgments of God. These seven angels were clothed in pure and white linen, and had their breasts girded with golden girdles; for in righteousness they went forth to execute judgment. Man too often meets sin by sin, but

God never does. He meets it and overcomes it by righteousness. Yet, whenever He shows Himself, it is an overwhelming sight. When the tabernacle was finished, "then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." And again, at the solemn dedication of the more gorgeous temple, "the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud." In like manner, also, it is said in this chapter that when the seven angels went forth to execute the judgments of God, "the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels are fulfilled."

Out of that glory which was blinding by excess of brightness, there was heard a great voice, saying to the seven angels, "Go your ways and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." In following out the course of this vision we cannot fail to note the analogy between the sounding of the first four trumpets and the outpouring of the first four vials. At the sounding of these trumpets, we saw the outworking of judgments upon heathenism in its destructive influence upon man's temporal interests. It was seen cursing the earth, the sea, the social life, and the governments of the nations. In like manner also the first four vials are poured out on the earth, the sea, the fountains and rivers of waters, and upon the sun. We are thus taught that man's earthly interests suffer by worldliness, even as they do by idolatry; that what is opposed to the word of God is also opposed to the prosperity of man even as a citizen of time. Wherever there is an infraction of the Divine command there must be corresponding loss. It may not be seen at once, it may take time to work out its results; but those results will surely come. Whether we look at individual life or the course of nations, we see that in the long run there can be no evasion of the action of those spiritual laws under which the human race is placed in the moral government of God. The meaning of the symbols here employed is simply this: if men forego

principle and yield to softness and self-sparing ; if there be an interference on the part of rulers with the consciences of their subjects ; if a perversion of truth be taught by a corrupt priesthood for truth itself, and if this intrusion of the ruling power and this false teaching be supported by the tyranny of a public opinion which has grown out of them both, then shall direful consequences surely follow. And what is of special importance to notice is that these consequences will result not to those who resist but to those who conform to these evil principles. Every one knows that those who have resisted the dictation of rulers in spiritual things, and the insolent assumptions of priestcraft, have suffered again and again. They laid their account with this, and were not surprised when it came. They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. That *they* suffered is perfectly well understood. But the vision goes beyond that. It shows that the power of the civil ruler exercised in the spiritual realm, the influence of priestcraft in false teaching, and the result of a low tone of public feeling on the Saviour's claims, will be more destructive to those who yield to and support them, than to those who resist them. And that destructive influence will be felt affecting earthly interests as well as heavenly. If you place the outpouring of the first four vials beside the sounding of the first four trumpets, and recall the explanation already given, you will see that in the same order the earth, the sea, the fountains and rivers of water, and the sun are smitten ; every department of life suffers when men yield to evil principles and corrupt affections.

This could easily be shown to be true, even when these principles and affections are kept in check by better influences, and are only partially supreme ; but perhaps the lesson of the vision will be all the more forcible, if we take instances where both causes and effects are clearly acknowledged. It will be difficult to find a more striking case in illustration than that of the Netherlands, during the sway of Philip II. of Spain. When his father passed on to him the rule of the empire, there were, in the Low Countries, thousands of God-fearing men, who held to the purer faith. In

days when there was a fair measure of liberty of conscience, their cities were among the most prosperous on the face of the earth. Busy artisans and flourishing traders swarmed in their streets, and the sails of their merchantmen whitened almost every sea. But the moody, narrow-minded Philip resolved, though he perished in the struggle, he would compel all his subjects to conform to the faith that to him seemed right. I need not repeat the dreadful story of his doings. What good men suffered through those weary years will never be fully known till the revelations of the great day. But they were not the only sufferers. They who bowed to the king's will, who worshipped the beast, who bore his name on their foreheads, they had their losses and sufferings too. Philip's persecution of the Protestants was not only a crime; it was a blunder. Trade and commerce forsook the land. The religious exiles carried with them various branches of industry, and established them elsewhere. Not a little of England's wealth to-day has risen from these good men, to whom she gave an asylum in the hour of their need. The persecutor crushed out the Reformed faith, but he crushed out temporal prosperity with it. The streets were silent where busy merchants once did congregate; and poverty, like an armed man, seized on some of the wealthiest cities of the world.

And we may go a step farther. Let there be little or no persecution, but let superstition and priestcraft be dominant; and the same results will follow. A priest-ridden nation is generally a nation steeped in poverty. Look at Spain, at the Papal States, at Ireland; and contrast their condition with that of Protestant nations. It is plain that if men surrender the right of private judgment at the bidding of a dominant caste; if they believe no matter what, because they are told to believe it, and for no better reason; if they crouch before a priest, instead of bending reverently before God, they grow superstitious and narrow-minded, and lose that enlightened enterprise by which national prosperity is gained and kept.

It is said in this chapter that the third angel poured his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters,—that is, upon the social city life of those who worshipped the beast and his image; and the waters became blood. There was the

outworking of retribution. And sometimes this comes in signal forms. Who can forget the dreadful massacre of St. Bartholomew, in France? Within a few hours, thousands of unsuspecting Protestants were murdered in cool blood. The righteous men, the holy seed, who were the substance of the nation, perished as by a blow. Slowly, but surely, they were avenged. An interval of two centuries passed by. At its beginning is the massacre of St. Bartholomew,—at its close the French Revolution. Nor is it mere fanaticism that connects the two events. Leave evil principles and influences unchecked by good men's lives, and corruption must ensue. The handwriting is upon the wall, and it is only a matter of time when the doom shall come. The actors in that dreadful tragedy thought only of smiting down those who had the misfortune to differ with them. They did far more. They cut down the plants our heavenly Father had planted, and the only hindrances to the growth of poisonous weeds were thus removed. Rank and strong these grew, and at last their fruit was ripe. And when the ingathering came, it might well bring out, strong and clear, the words before us: "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, who art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are guilty."

It is said that when the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun, power was given to it to scorch men with fire. That is, the ruling power in the land became destructive even to those who bent before it or supported it. A very slight review of the past will verify this. The power that plays the tyrant over conscientious men will very soon play the tyrant over those who have no regard to conscience. Herod will slay James, and thrust Peter into prison, to please the Jews; yet let not those Jews be too elated, for it will be their turn next. The wanton cruelty they have hounded on against others will grow more wanton by indulgence, and turn round upon them. The cause of freedom is every man's cause. They who worshipped the beast found that when the vial was poured out upon the sun, power was given to it to scorch men with

fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues, who ruleth in the kingdom of men, and appointeth over it whomsoever He will; and they repented not to give Him glory.

It will be still within your recollection that after the first four trumpets had sounded, the influence of idolatry upon the temporal interests of men was seen. And, then, when the fifth trumpet sounded, the more spiritual effects of idolatry were to be traced in the swarm of superstitions that rose from the pit and fastened not upon the property or the bodies of men, but upon their souls. In like manner, at the outpouring of the fifth vial, we pass into the region of man's inner life. "And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the throne of the beast: and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." The throne of the beast is the soul of the world-worshipper, for it is there that his authority is established. And when he rules there, his kingdom is full of darkness—full of wretchedness, too, for the worldly heart is ever weary and unsatisfied. The spiritual misery of Dives was expressed in the cry—"Let Lazarus dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." So they who rest in this world, and bow to unlawful authority, gnaw their tongues for pain. The burdened spirit finds no resting-place. The world cannot satisfy the heart; false authority cannot satisfy the conscience. Both were made for God, to Him they should bow, and in Him they must rest.

I need hardly point out the analogy between the sounding of the sixth trumpet and the outpouring of the sixth vial. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the river, the great one, the Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." Here we have the beginning of the end of that Babylon, which, as we have seen, is the figure under which the world-worshippers, as one community, are set forth. And the manner of its overthrow receives its meaning from the way in which the real, historical city of

Babylon was destroyed. Long had Cyrus, with his eastern forces, laid siege to the city, and at length victory was won by stratagem. He dug a new channel for the river Euphrates; and on the night of Belshazzar's feast the waters were diverted, and along the river's bed the warriors poured on into the city. "The waters of the Euphrates were dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." It is merely a symbolic way of telling us that the means of defence by which evil principles are upheld, and in which their votaries trust shall be taken from them, as was Babylon's strong stay on that fatal night. The river in which they trusted, as an obstacle to the foe, gave its bed as the path of their progress; and thus was the way of the victors prepared.

The hour of crisis and overthrow draws nearer. Yet those who are to be destroyed see not whither all things are tending. They are the subjects of strong delusions that they should believe a lie. Deceiving influences, set forth under the figure of frogs coming forth out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, lead them on to their ruin. They who are destitute of good influences and holy inspiration are the abiding place of unclean spirits. By these they are infatuated—impelled forward to the day of decision and manifestation, when all masks shall be stripped away, and when that which is worldly and unspiritual shall be openly seen and felt to be hostile to the truth of God. The day shall declare it, that great day of God Almighty. It is God's day, though lying spirits have gathered the kings of the earth and of the whole world to the battle, to the last conflict of great principles. To the crisis all things are steadily converging, and in this fact there is solemn warning. The manifestation will be complete, and it will burst upon the world when men little dream that such a thing is near. "Behold I come as a thief, suddenly, and by surprise, at the darkest hour, in the time of sleep and unconsciousness. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Blessed is he whose loins are girt about, and his light burning, when the great day of God Almighty shall dawn.

It is again said that God gathered together those who are thus worldly and deceived, gathered them together unto a place called, in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon, or, more properly, Harmagedon. The very sound of this word suggests a host of curious speculations about unfulfilled prophecy. It is associated in one's mind with pamphlets of startling purport, pointing to the siege of Sebastopol, the war in Italy, or to battles elsewhere, as the fulfilment of the conflict here foretold. Time after time have these appeared, furnished a subject of momentary excitement to the crowd of readers always on the out-look for such things, and then have quietly floated down the stream to forgetfulness. Up to this point we have again and again seen that in Scripture itself we have the surest clue to the interpretation of the symbols of Scripture, and that we need not go crying *Lo here!* or *lo there!* to find out the meaning. The mystic battle of Harmagedon is no exception; as a reference to the Old Testament I think will show.

Harmagedon means the city or mountain of Megiddo. It rises from the famous plain of Esdraelon or Jezreel, which was the great battle-field of Palestine. This great plain is sometimes called the valley of Megiddo, from the city which stood on its southern border. Dean Stanley has pointed out the analogy between this plain and the plain of Stirling.* Both are situated at the opening of the highlands, and both have been the scenes of the most decisive battles in the history of their respective countries. The valley of Megiddo is all the more significant for the purpose of the vision before us, because the battles on this plain were those to which the Israelites were forced by hostile or invading armies. When they could choose their own ground, they preferred to fight in their mountain passes. "Two kings perished on its soil; some of Israel's chief victories were won here; and also two of the saddest dirges of the Jewish nation were evoked by the defeats of Gilboa and Megiddo." It was hard by "the waters of Megiddo" that Deborah, that mother in Israel, and Barak, with the chiefs of Issachar, overthrew the Canaanitish host of Sisera, which Jabin led. It was on this plain that Gideon and his three hundred trusty men scattered to the

* "Sinai and Palestine," p. 337.

winds the army of the Midianites. It was on that bleak, grey ridge, dividing the plain eastward, on mount Gilboa, that God-forsaken Saul came to his sad end, and "the beauty of Israel was slain upon the high places." Here, at a later day, when Shalmanezar came against Hosea, "the bow of Israel was broken in the valley of Jezreel;" and here, also, Judah's power went down when the Egyptian archers shot at king Josiah, and, sore wounded, he was carried to Jerusalem to die. And there is yet one other event we must not pass by. At the western apex of the plain, on the overhanging brow of Carmel, there was a conflict more momentous than any of these. It was there that the solitary and commanding figure of Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, confronted the prophets of Baal and Astarte. It was there that he cried to the apostate nation, "How long are you to halt and totter, first on one knee, and then on the other? If Jehovah be your God, walk straight after Him; if Baal, walk straight after him!" Here the lying prophets did their utmost to prove their lord to be the God. In frenzied state they tossed to and fro the swords and lances which formed part of their fantastic worship, and gashed themselves and each other till they were smeared with blood. When their ravings were ended, Elijah with his own hand raised the ruined altar of the Lord, and, as the hour of the evening sacrifice drew near, he sent up to heaven four short cries to the God of his fathers * :—

"JEHOVAH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hear me :

"JEHOVAH : hear me this day in fire, and let all this people know that *Thou* art JEHOVAH the God of Israel, and *I* am Thy servant, and through Thee I have done all these things :

"Hear me, O JEHOVAH :

"Hear me, and let this people know that *Thou*, Jehovah, art the God, and that *Thou* hast turned their hearts back again."

On the open mountain-top, and in a moment, there fell fire from the Lord out of heaven. So complete was the proof, that even that wavering multitude cried "JEHOVAH HE is God! JEHOVAH HE is God!" There, prostrate before the prophet, they lay on the mountain-side. "He was now the ruler of the nation. His word was law. In

* Stanley's "Jewish Church," Second Series, pp. 303, 304.

that sudden revulsion of feeling 'the wheel had come full cycle round.' *The persecutors became the victims.* The prophets of Baal were seized; they were swept away by the wild multitude. Elijah himself led them down the mountain-slopes to the gorge of the Kishon. As Phinehas, as Samuel, before him, so Elijah now took upon himself the dreadful office of executioner. Sword in hand, he stood over the unresisting prophets, and in one swift and terrible slaughter they fell by the sacred stream, by the waters of Megiddo.*

Take all these references together, and let me now ask what place could be more significant as the symbol of the world's great battle-field, whereon should be fought the final conflict between the hosts of good and evil? No material warfare is here intended by the battle of Harnagedon, no conflict between armies of flesh and blood. It is to a spiritual strife, it is to that decisive issue to which all principles, good and bad, are tending, that our thoughts are turned in the vision before us. It is as when in ancient days the Lord said to His people by the mouth of Ezekiel, "I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage. The day of the Lord cometh. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations."

Returning to our exposition, we find that after the apostle had seen the gathering of the mystic hosts to Harnagedon, he was called to behold the conclusion of this part of the vision. "The seventh angel poured out his vial into the air;" upon the empire at large of him who is the Prince of the power of the air; "and there came a great voice out of the innermost shrine, from the throne, saying, It is done." The work of the seven angels is finished, and the mystery of God is accomplished. Awful portents attend the consummation. "There were voices and thunders and lightnings, and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great." The handwriting on the wall has been interpreted, and the doom is come.

* *Ibid.*, p. 305.

"The great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell," all lesser forms of corruption shared in the overthrow ; and she who had sat as a queen, who had sinned with impunity so boldly and so long, she, "great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." The signs of the final judgment are everywhere manifest, for the end is come. "And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent : and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail ; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

"Awake ! again the Gospel trump is blown :
From year to year it swells with louder tone ;
From year to year the signs of wrath
Are gathering round the Judge's path,
Strange words fulfilled, and mighty works achieved,
And truth in all the world both hated and believed.

Thus bad and good their several warnings give
Of His approach, whom none may see and live :
Faith's ear, with awful still delight,
Counts them like minute bells at night,
Keeping the heart awake till dawn of morn,
While to her funeral pile this aged world is borne.

But what are Heaven's alarms, to hearts that cower
In wilful slumber, deepening every hour,
That draw their curtains closer round,
The nearer swells the trumpet's sound ?
Lord, ere our trembling lamps sink down and die,
Touch us with chastening hand, and make us feel Thee nigh."

IX.

GREAT BABYLON'S DOOM.

REVELATION xvii., xviii.

IN the fourteenth chapter of this book John tells us that he saw an angel flying in mid-heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to the dwellers on the earth. "And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Again, at the outpouring of the sixth vial the great river Euphrates was dried up, and we were thus taught that mystical Babylon's defence was gone, and her end was near. And finally, when the seventh vial had been emptied "the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell; and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."

The burden of these two chapters now before us, then, has been again and again anticipated in the course of our exposition. What we are to look for now is a fuller description of the overthrow thus repeatedly and solemnly announced.

In a previous lecture I have endeavoured to show that the great harlot and the city Babylon mean one and the same thing—the false Church which has grown up in the midst of the true; just as the bride the Lamb's wife, and the holy city New Jerusalem both represent the same thing—the community of the real followers of the Lord Jesus. That this is the case can hardly be doubted after the reference I made to the twenty-first chapter. One of the seven angels, which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, appeared to the apostle, saying to him, Come

hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. But, instead of showing him a woman, he showed him that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. Thus they are set over against each other, the chaste bride and the adulterous harlot, the worldly Babylon and the holy Jerusalem. And I think you will see that by the blending of the two figures together the thought to be conveyed is materially enlarged and strengthened. For example, when truly believing souls, the living members of Christ's body as one community are compared to a chaste bride, the principal idea is that of their moral purity, spirituality of mind, and faithfulness to their Lord. But when we pass from the figure of a bride to that of a great city, we think rather of the Church's stability, wide-reaching extent, and grandeur. So, also, on the other hand, with the false Church. When it is compared to an adulterous harlot the prominent idea is that of the worldly principles and compliance, the unspirituality of mind and unfaithfulness to Christ, which mark those who worship the beast. And when that false Church is compared to the great city Babylon, we think not so much of the impiety as of the numbers, wealth, and power which the worldly-hearted have on their side. Thus, in each case, when the two comparisons are taken together, there is a completeness and vigour of conception which one alone could not give. In the chapter to which we now proceed, both are found. We have first the figure of the great harlot, and then that of the great city, Babylon.

In proceeding with the exposition of this seventeenth chapter, I may point out in passing that as one of the seven angels, having the seven vials, offered to show John the bride the Lamb's wife, so one of these same angels is there represented as saying to him, "Come hither, I will show thee the judgement of the great harlot that is seated upon the many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunken out of the wine of her fornication."

In the ecstatic condition so often described in this book as being "in the spirit," John was borne by this angel into the desert. Here he beheld a sight which caused him great astonishment. He saw the same beast that he had before

seen rising out of the sea, scarlet coloured as the ravager, and having seven heads and ten horns, indicating his widespread dominion and manifold forms of power. He was covered with titles of blasphemy, significant of his many assumptions of that authority which belongs to God alone and to which no earthly power has or can have any right. Upon the beast, and therefore supported by him, there sat a voluptuous woman, arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and jewels and pearls. In her hand she held a golden cup, teeming with abominations and with the unclean things of the fornication of the earth. Upon her forehead was this name written,—A SECRET: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. As there she sat, she was drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

The apostle beheld all this with great astonishment, and not without reason. Into that desert he had seen the Church, the woman who gave birth to the man child, flee from the face of the dragon. Thither he follows her now, and to his amazement she is no longer what she was. She has become a worldly, degraded, luxurious woman. She is not clothed with fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints,—but in purple and scarlet, the colours of the kings of this world, the tokens of transient pleasure as opposed to eternal blessedness. She is decked with gold and jewels and pearls, the best, no doubt, of worldly attire, but all the perishable things of earth. The dragon no longer persecutes her; there is no need, for now they are one in spirit. The scarlet beast, to whom the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority, supports the woman. The worldly power and the Church no longer carry on war to the death. They are in friendly alliance. The woman is seated upon the scarlet beast. The Church has sunk down to the world's level; she leans on worldly confidences, and is ambitious of power in the worldly sphere. She claims to be robed with royal authority, but she is no longer the bride the Lamb's wife. When the vision opened, in the twelfth chapter, there was but one woman; henceforth there are two, the chaste bride and the adulterous harlot. For, henceforth, there are in

literal fact two great parties, both claiming the name Christian, both avowedly followers of Christ, but having aims and principles widely different. It is with the Church of Christ as with the ancient chosen nation. They were not all Israel which were of Israel. Bearing the same name, and enclosed within the same boundaries of Canaan, there were the followers of Baal and the followers of Jehovah. So has it ever been. Man sees many divisions in the Church; God sees only two. Man talks of the Church Eastern or Western, Greek or Roman, Papal or Protestant, Episcopalian or Congregational, Conformist or Nonconformist; God simply divides them all into the spiritual and the unspiritual. And these are both found in all the Churches I have named.

The true Israel, the followers of the Lamb, are they who lean upon spiritual life and power. They say, "Not by royal edicts, not by parliamentary enactments, not by wealth and lands, the smiles of the noble, the patronage of the great; not by these do we stand strong, not in these do we trust. 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' We believe in the power of truth to arrest the conscience and free the heart. We lean upon the constant presence of Christ in His Church. Our strong arm of confidence is that Divine Spirit who was given at Pentecost, and who has been in faithful hearts ever since. We believe that when we lean upon worldly power we are weaker for it and not stronger. We at once become blinded to the real issues of our warfare, we turn away unbelievingly from the only strength that can win the victory, and we trust to a weapon that pierces our own hands in the day of battle. When we cease to identify ourselves, both in sorrow and in joy, with Christ our risen and living Lord; when we cease to aim at the same objects after which He strove; when we no longer seek to tread in the path over which He travelled before us; then our mission to the children of men is an utter failure. The lights of the world are quenched in darkness, the salt of the earth

has 'lost its savour, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.'"

On the other hand, they who are of Israel, yet not Israel,—the unspiritual—have grown up a large and powerful party, having other watchwords and different weapons of warfare. They are described under the figure of the harlot, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and who made the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication. She is the Church become worldly. "promising to those who imbibe her spirit a crown without a cross, a pathway to glory without suffering in the flesh and ceasing from sin; presenting to them, not the Lord's cup of manifold temptations and resistance unto blood against sin, but the golden cup of fleshly indulgence and foul abominations." "Her rightful Lord and Husband, Jehovah-Christ, and the joys and goods of His house are no longer her all in all; but she runs after the visible and vain things of the world in its manifold manifestations. This whoredom appears in its proper form where the Church wishes to be itself a worldly power, uses politics and diplomacy, makes flesh her arm, uses unholy means for holy ends, spreads her dominion by sword or money, fascinates the hearts of men by sensuous ritualism, allows herself to become 'mistress of ceremonies' to the dignitaries of this world, flatters prince or people—the living or the dead, in short, where the Church, like Israel of old, seeks the help of one worldly power against the danger threatening from another. In these cases, the charge of spiritual adultery most strongly applies. But not in these alone. Whenever the Church forgets that she is in the world even as Christ was in the world, as a bearer of the cross and pilgrim, that the world is crucified to her and judged; whenever the Church regards in her heart the world as a reality, and acknowledges her as a power whose anger she endeavours to avoid, with whom she tries to make some compromise, whose pleasures and enjoyments seem to her desirable, with whose wisdom, education, science, spirit, though opposed to God's truth, she coquets; whenever such is the case, adultery is committed in essential reality. For its essence consists in leaning and listening and conforming to, and relying on the world. And her judgment

is great, because her sin is great. God, who has shown to the Church the fulness of His grace and purchased her with the blood of His Son, can and must require of her pure and perfect surrender. Hence, in proportion as His love was great, His wrath is great; as liberal and generous as His mercies are, even so severe and awful are His judgments. Sin appears more sinful in God's eyes than in ours; but the most heinous of all sins is the sin of those to whom God has shown His saving grace, who have God's word and know it, and who are called to serve Him. The worldliness of the Church is the most worldly and profane of all worldliness."*

At sight of this adulterous woman seated on the scarlet beast, John marvelled with great astonishment. And well he might; for it was not a power heathen in its origin, but spiritual, and still claiming to possess a spiritual character, that had sunk so low. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Yet it is not plain to every one that this corrupt thing is not Christian life. Upon her brow is the name, "A Secret." Her real character is not discovered by the merely natural apprehension. It requires the wisdom that comes from spiritual life, from union with Christ, to discern the emptiness of her pretensions.

She is further described as the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth; for a worldly Church is the prolific source of indifferentism and scepticism. Men look at her as if she and the Christian faith were one and the same thing, and judge that faith accordingly. Thus judged, its claims are soon dismissed; and men, resolved not to be imposed upon by that which seems repugnant to their common sense, cast off fear, and pursue the dreary journey of life without God and without hope in the world. This is how men beyond her pale are affected; while within that pale no superstition is too gross to find harbour in the darkness, and no corruption too fearful to fester there.

Seeing the apostle's great astonishment, the angel said

* "Auberlen on the Prophet Daniel," etc., pp. 286 *et seq.*

unto him, "Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns." He proceeds to say that "the beast was and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition." This corresponds to what John observed when the beast first appeared. He saw one of the beast's heads as it were wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed. This means that Jewish persecuting power, once so rampant, had, in the vision of Jerusalem's overthrow, been seen to be broken. He was, and is not. There is a respite for a time; but the beast shall again ascend out of the bottomless pit, shall again incite other powers against the true Church. And for a while he shall succeed. But his triumph shall be short-lived; and when his hour is come, he shall again go into perdition. During that time of transient success he shall bear the harlot to such power and authority that all who dwell in the earth, who are unspiritual, who are deceived by appearances, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,—all these shall wonder when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Then, passing from one figure to the other, from the idea of an adulterous woman to that of a proud, luxurious, and powerful city, the angel goes on to say, "Here is the understanding that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, and upon them the woman is seated." That is, what the seven heads of the beast were to the harlot, her strength and support,—that the seven mountains are to the city, to which the false Church is also compared, giving an idea of its great extent, and the firmness of its foundations so far as worldly influence is concerned. Thus, the figure being changed from a harlot to a city and from the seven heads of the beast to seven mountains on which that city rests, there is further added the thought of the empire that bears sway within that city, and of its kings. Seven sovereigns also are they. To the woman they are seven hills on which the city rests; to the beast they are seven kings, or successive forms of manifestation of the worldly principle: the change in the one figure requiring a change in the other.

These seven kings set forth the complete and countless efforts of the worldly, persecuting power against the spiritual government of God; for this is here, as elsewhere in this book, the idea of the symbolic number seven. These efforts of the civil power pure and simple are nearly exhausted. Five kings, said the angel, are fallen: one is the Jewish persecuting rule, which thou hast seen smitten in vision, although for a little while it exists in fact; and the other, the purely heathen opposition to the kingdom of Christ, is not yet fully come; when he cometh, he will have his time,—he must continue a short space, corresponding to the Church's 1260 days of sorrow. "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." The climax is reached when this beast, the eighth, one more than could reasonably have been dreamt of or looked for, born of all the seven and containing all the dangerous elements of the past,—when this enters into unhallowed alliance with the Church herself. This is a form of peril that could hardly have been anticipated, arising from a union of purpose between the woman and the beast. Yet even this, fearful and unexpected as it might well be, shall not always prevail. It will have a long run, and be very disastrous; but its end also shall come,—the eighth goeth into perdition.

Now, while the beast and the woman together shall do their utmost against the true Church, the civil power urged on by the ecclesiastical, the seven heads supporting the woman and doing her bidding; the civil power, by itself and for its own end, shall also carry on hostilities against the kingdom of God. The beast has not only seven heads, but also ten horns. It will not perish till it has put forth marvellous energy. While supporting the false Church, it will put forth its ten (that is its indefinite but many) forms of power, against the followers of Jesus. *It shall do this*; for these forms of power are not yet put forth, and when they are they shall be shortlived. "They shall be as kings one hour with the beast." Amidst all political changes the world will find new means for attacking the Church of Christ, though its heads be destroyed. "These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the

Lamb shall overcome them : for He is Lord of lords and King of kings : and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful."

As if to prevent any interpretation of the symbols of this chapter which should narrow them down to one corrupt Church, the angel now explains, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. Her dominion is wide spread, the corruption is in directions manifold. Yet, vast as that dominion is, it shall be overthrown. And retribution shall work out in quarters whence it might be least expected. "The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the word of God shall be fulfilled." To the carrying out of the purposes of God, all men are subservient. They accomplish His designs, even when they are opposing His will ; and the temporary prevalence of evil and its final destruction are under His control. The very power on which the worldly Church has leaned shall prove her overthrow ; the very horns of that scarlet beast on which the harlot was seated shall turn against her, and make her desolate. These horns we have seen represent the civil and political power of states, as distinct from the seven heads which represent the politico-ecclesiastical. The secular power supported the ecclesiastical in its arrogant assumptions, and the secular power will turn round and strip off the worldly glitter it gave. In these our days there are not wanting signs and tokens of this reaction. I have again and again guarded myself from speaking of any one Church as being the one and only one referred to in these symbols. In the most corrupt communion, truly godly men have been and are still found ; and in the purest communion, on the other hand, unspiritual hearts have place. But in so far as even good men lean on worldly support, or any Church, however noble in other respects, trusts to the secular arm, they shall experience this reaction. It is part of God's counsels, and must be fulfilled. We may regard the events of the last few years in Italy in illustration. The kings of the earth

enriched the Papal Church with worldly spoil, and we have lived to see the same power strip away her possessions. They have made her desolate and naked in so far as her temporal grandeur is concerned, and the separation has been like the tearing of her flesh. She chafes, and frets, and denounces as blasphemous the spirit of the age. But she fulminates in vain. Still the ten horns turn against her, and make her desolate. And I am much mistaken if this generation will not live to see something analogous in the history of the State establishment of our own land. We honour and love the Episcopal Church as we recognise the piety and learning of her sons, and their eminent services to the cause of humanity and the kingdom of God. But we denounce, and must to our latest breath, her alliance with the State. It is an adulterous bond; and if it is not broken, worse things will follow. But broken it will be; if not in our days, in those of our children. The parliament that made will unmake. The state power that gave her her political prestige, will, as in the past, by enactment after enactment, take it away. I may not live to see it, but it will come. The army of those whose watchword is "Religious Equality" is increasing, and showing a firmer front day by day. The voice with which they demand the rights of Christian men is not loud, but deep and resolute. And it will be a great day for the English Church herself when those rights are granted, when the only distinctions recognised are those conferred on learning and piety, on zeal and fidelity, on experience and weight of character. When that day comes she will be free from shackles by which she is now hampered, and she will be open to the outpouring of God's blessing as she has never yet been.*

* I cannot refrain from giving, in a note, the frank and manly words of one, who speaks not as a Dissenter but as a Churchman, and a Churchman who, till lately, held with honour the chair of Modern History at Oxford. I mean Professor Goldwin Smith. In a speech at Denbigh, on the 21st of September, 1866, after avowing himself "a member of that party, which, though not regularly organized, is actively working for liberation and equality within the Established Church," he adds:—"I dare say there are some who will say, 'Yes, there are traitors within the walls of the Establishment, co-operating with the enemy without.' To this, I answer, there are two things—the English Church and the establishment, and it is because I am a faithful son of the English Church that

We have now reached the eighteenth chapter, which we shall find to be simply the fitting climax to what has gone before concerning Babylon. After the apostle had seen the symbol of the voluptuous woman enthroned on the scarlet beast, and heard the further statement of the angel who showed it to him, he then saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. This shining one cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird;" just as it was said of the literal Babylon after its overthrow, "Wild beasts of the desert shall be there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there; and wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces." The doleful doom of the actual city should have its counterpart in the doom of the figurative Babylon. "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies."

I am the hearty and avowed enemy of the establishment. Unless the establishment dies, the English Church cannot live; for no Christian institution can possibly live when it is identified, as the Established Church is, with flagrant injustice. Even in England I see a large body, perhaps now not far from half the population, dissenters from the creed of the establishment, yet forced to contribute to its endowments, and, till lately, forced to undergo political disabilities, in order that the Established Church might preserve its domination. I cross to Ireland; there I find a people miserably poor, yet compelled, out of their poverty, to pay tithes to an alien Church. I come then to Wales; and there, again, I find that Church of which I am a member endowed with everything except with the hearts of the people, established in everything except that in which alone a Christian Church should be established. And I ask you to look within the Church also at the results of the establishment—desperate quarrels and scandalous litigation, which not only are weakening the Church, but tend to degrade Christianity itself in the eyes of the people. The remedy for all this, the simple remedy, is freedom. More than once an establishment has all but wrecked religion, and freedom has restored it to life. Free Christianity, in two centuries, against all disadvantages, won the ancient world; an establishment has all but lost the modern world; freedom will restore the modern world to Christianity."

So spake the mighty angel, who had lightened the earth with his glory. And when he had vanished, there was heard a mysterious voice crying out of heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." All her worldly joy and triumph shall have its night of awful darkness. It shall be said to her as to Dives and to every earth-bound soul, "Thou hast had thy good things." "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord who judgeth her."

This voice from heaven then describes, in high poetic strain, the scene of Babylon's overthrow. As, when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham looked toward these cities, and toward all the land of the plain, and behold and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace,—so mystical Babylon is described as a city in flames; and as the lurid glare goes up to heaven, both on sea and land there are awe-stricken spectators of the catastrophe.

THE KINGS OF THE EARTH, with whom she had formed corrupt alliances, looking on at the smoke of her burning, but standing afar off for the fear of her torment, cry, "*Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*"

THE MERCHANTS OF THE EARTH, who have carried on traffic in this city, weep and mourn over her. Within her they have had their merchandise. There was no buying of the truth there, none of the merchandise of wisdom; but the merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones, of costly garments and articles of luxury and adornment, of all that was dainty and goodly, and that ministered to earthly delight. But all is over now, and this traffic for ever at an end; and the merchants of these things, that were made rich by her,

shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, "*Alas, alas, that great city! that was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. For in one hour so great riches is come to nought!*"

And the MARINERS, who had traded in her port, every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like unto this great city!" And casting dust on their heads, they cried, weeping and wailing, and saying, "*Alas, alas, that great city! wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea, by reason of her costliness. For in one hour is she made desolate!*"

But when the world's joy is turned to weeping, the weeping of the true Church is turned to rejoicing, for the mysterious voice concludes with these words of exultation, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her!"

And now that heavenly voice is silent; but the vision of the city's overthrow is not even yet complete. A mighty angel appeared on the scene, and, lifting a stone that was like a huge millstone, he hurled it into the sea; and as the waters seethed and foamed, he cried, "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." The voice from heaven had first described the city's overthrow to be as when the spires of flame shot up from Sodom and Gomorrah, and cast their awful glare on all the plain. Now this mighty angel deepens the impression by describing the after desolation to be as when the traveller looks on the ruined cities of the East as they lie in heaps and mounds, and steeped in the silence of death.

Never again shall the sounds of merry-making and gladness rise within thee. "The voice of harpers and musicians, and of pipers and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee." Never again shall the prosperous work of peaceful industry be plied within thee. "No craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee." Neither with cheerful noise shall the bread of the household be prepared again. "The sound of a millstone shall be

heard no more at all in thee." And it shall not be as of old, when the day's work was done, and the whole household met with gladsome looks round the pleasant hearth and the cheerful light; for "the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee." Never again shall marriage-bells be heard within thee, as loving hearts plight their troth and become in the midst of the generations a link between the future and the past. "The voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee."

Thus utter and complete shall be the city's desolation; thus utter and complete shall be the overthrow of every evil system that opposes the truth of God, and that rests upon the power of this world. "For lo, Thine enemies, O Lord, for lo, Thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: that men may know that Thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the Most High over all the earth."

X.

THE BRIDAL AND THE BATTLE.

REVELATION xix.

THE mysterious voice that described great Babylon's overthrow with such graphic power represents the kings, the merchants, and mariners of the earth bemoaning her dreadful fall with strong cries of sorrow and with tears. Yet that voice finishes its utterance with these words of exultation, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." Then the mighty angel hurled the millstone into the deep, and described the desolation that would follow the overthrow. Immediately there was a response to the voice that called for joy and rejoicing at the doom of the adulterous city. "After this, I heard as it were the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying—

"Hallelujah!
The salvation and glory and power of our God;
For true and righteous are His judgments;
For He has judged the great harlot,
Who corrupted the earth by her whoredom;
And avenged the blood of His servants at her hand."

And a second time they said—

"Hallelujah! and her smoke ascends for ever and ever."

And the four-and-twenty elders and the four creatures fell down and worshipped God, who sits on the throne, saying—

"Amen, hallelujah!"

Thus, while some men weep, heaven rejoices. Yet heaven does not rejoice at that which brings misery to man; heaven would destroy that which is man's bane and curse,

and that alone. Salvation is the key-note of this cry of exultation. Men pray to be delivered from judgments, whereas judgments are meant to be deliverances,—deliverances from that which has defiled the earth and filled it with misery. It is far more noble and righteous to wish that the world should pass through the fires that will cleanse it, than that it should be allowed to go on in its wickedness. By His judgments, God is working to bring us into our true state; and every overthrow of evil is a step towards it, and therefore a cause for rejoicing. It has been significantly asked, "How do men rise out of the mire into which they are daily sinking more and more deeply? All would say, not by acquiescence, but by protest. They affirm that mire is not the element in which human beings were meant to live. Though a hundred wish to abide in it, one or two continue to affirm for themselves, and for the rest, that that is not their state; if they can see no other, they can see that there must be another. This protest and affirmation become prayer." That prayer, when answered, becomes deliverance; and that deliverance comes by the overthrow of the oppressing evil. "We, who accept Jesus Christ as God's own Son, believe that the world's Creator is the world's Deliverer. Whatever makes the earth corrupt, whatever makes human beings corrupt, we believe to come, not from His order, but from a breach of His order. We are bound, by our allegiance to Him, not to accept anomalies as laws, but to strive against them. We are bound to believe that He is stirring us to strive against them. We have a right to pray against them, whatever they be, our prayers being merely the response to His inspiration,—cries for the triumph of His will over that which opposes it." And when the answer to such God-inspired prayer is given, according to a man's spiritual nature does He rejoice or weep. If he be blind and worldly, he will weep. But if he be God-enlightened, and long for nobleness and purity,—if his hopes are the onward reaching hopes of humanity, then with all his heart he will rejoice. And when Babylon, in any form, is overthrown, he will join his voice to that of the heavenly multitude, crying, "Hallelujah! The *salvation* and glory and honour and power of our God." And though the smoke of the city

ascends for ever and ever, a second time will he cry, and that louder than before, "Hallelujah!"

Praise for the overthrow of evil is now followed by praise for the final establishment of good. The Church, robed in purity and crowned with glory, is to be espoused to her Lord. A voice came out of the throne, saying—

"Praise our God, all ye His servants,
And ye who fear Him, both small and great."

To this call for praise there was at once a grand and stirring response. Again the apostle heard the voice of a great multitude, even as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of loud thunders, saying—

"Hallelujah !
For the Lord reigneth, God the almighty.
Let us rejoice, and let us exult,
And we will give the honour unto Him ;
For the marriage of the Lamb is near,
And His Bride hath prepared herself."

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, shining, undefiled ; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the holy. Then one said to the apostle, "Write, Blessed are they who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb." And with emphasis he adds, "These are the true declarations of God."

Let us strive to enter into the spiritual truth here symbolised by the bridal of redeemed souls. We are candidates for spiritual scenes and relationships we as yet imperfectly realize. But we have helps, in things that are seen, to the right understanding of things that are not seen. Thoughtful minds, in every age, have felt the mysterious harmonies between the two worlds, and mused on the question which Milton brings from the angel's lips—

"What if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?"

It may be but a fugitive fancy, yet, as I have looked on the exquisite beauty of the sunlight dancing among the forest leaves, or gazed on the stately grandeur of the mountains, receiving delight, indeed, from any of the myriad forms of life and loveliness that nature takes before us, I have

cherished the feeling that there is something on the other side of the veil of which all this is the earthly counterpart; stripped of its weaker elements, that which I love here shall be permanent there. Between what God has made here in the material world, and what He will show us hereafter in the spiritual world, subtle and far reaching correspondences there may be, I am inclined to think there will be. However, without pressing this feeling beyond our warrant, we are certainly taught in Scripture that some things in both worlds are linked together by inward necessity and by the law of a secret affinity. Earthly relations are often only a lower form of heavenly. Human fatherhood, for example, is something more than a mere illustration of the Divine; and the status of the child in the household is a profound foreshadowing of the sonship of the children of God. Marriage, again, when it is what God meant it to be, does not merely happen, but was intended to suggest the union between believing souls and Christ and the strong formative influence on character that follows. I need scarcely remind you how this thought is found in Scripture again and again. In a psalm of striking beauty, the royal Bridegroom is thus addressed, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. All Thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made Thee glad. Kings' daughters were among Thy honourable women; upon Thy right hand did stand the queen, in gold of Ophir." Then, turning to this royal consort, the psalmist says, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget, also, thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." Thus he describes this spiritual bride, "The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is embroidered with gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework; the virgins, her companions that follow her, shall be brought unto Thee." The prophets, also, speak of this Divine espousal. Isaiah says to Israel, "Thy Maker is thine Husband;" and "As

the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." The idolatrous nation shall return from its wanderings, and, saith the Lord, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord." The New Testament takes up and expands the same idea. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king who made a marriage for his son; the ten virgins of the parable go forth to meet the bridegroom. The apostle Paul, watching over the spiritual life of the Corinthian Church, says, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." In another epistle, speaking of the marriage relation, he says that "we are members of Christ's body, of His flesh, and of His bones. *For this cause* shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." On this high ground he enforces conjugal affection: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Reverent hearts will joyfully ponder the truths here embodied in symbol. The closest relationship of human life is used to typify the union of the Saviour and the believing soul. In tenderest forms the fellowship of eternity is thus presented. For now is the time of betrothal only; when the bride is ready, the bridal day will come, and beyond that, the joyful wedded life of which the marriage feast is but the prelude. To the loftiest minds this symbol will be most suggestive. A thoughtful essayist* has pointed out that the poets, for the most part, have sung of love and its joys before, rather than after, the bridal day. He shows that there is no necessity for this, because "the emotional and truly human life of a man and woman, so far from being over when from

* The late George Brimley, of Cambridge.

lovers they become husband and wife, then only begins to attain its full growth and capacity of bearing fruit and flower, of perennial beauty and fragrance." And because this is so, the truest fellowship between the soul and its Saviour will be beyond the bridal day, and not now, in the mere time of betrothal. Who has not marked the elevating influence of wedded life, where it is in some measure in conformity to the Divine ideal? In true fealty of heart, two travellers set forth on the journey of life together. Henceforth there is oneness of interest, such as there is in no other relationship of life. There is constant play of feeling, and interaction of influence in the formation of character. Love deepens, and becomes more tranquil, if less demonstrative, as the years roll by. The husband grows dearer than the lover; and, time having oft and again proved her tender fidelity, the wife is more cherished than the bride. Satirists and cynics have said a good deal on the other side; but who has not found marriages which

" Have wrought
Two spirits to one equal mind,
With blessings beyond hope or thought,
With blessings which no words can find ? "

" With the humblest and most sordid cares of life are intimately associated the calm delights, the settled bliss of home; upon duties, in themselves, perhaps, often wearisome and uninteresting, hang the prosperity and the happiness of wife and children; there is no mean hope, because there is no hope in which regard for others does not largely mingle,—no base fear, because suffering and distress cannot affect self alone; the selfishness which turns honest industry to greed, and noble ambition to egotistical love of power, is exorcised; and life becomes a perpetual exercise of duties which are delights, and delights which are duties." Such, oftentimes, is the lower, earthly type; what, then, shall be the heavenly antitype? What tender confidings, what sweet interchange of affection, what wondrous development of spiritual grace and power are shadowed forth as we read of the marriage of the Lamb with the Church He has chosen for His Bride! The life beyond is negatively described when we are told that there shall be no pain, or

sorrow, or death, or crying ; no night, no curse. But here we have something more positive. As the dearly loved wife is in the home of the husband to whom she is all the world, so shall redeemed souls dwell with their Lord. His joys shall be theirs, and their dower shall be the riches of glory treasured up in Him. Anywhere with Him would be heaven, and they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive" what that wedded life shall be to which the bridal day is the introduction. Well, then, might the voice from the throne cry out, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come." The day of earthly espousals is a day of joy. Two young hearts plight their troth before God and man ; and, as they come forth from the altar, henceforth one till death shall part them, flowers are strewn before them, and overhead—

" Begins the clash and clang that tells
The joy to every wandering breeze ;
The blind wall rocks, and on the trees
The dead leaf trembles to the bells.
O happy hour ! and happier hours
Await them."

But the brightest marriage day of all has yet to come, and its joy shall know no after sorrow. Here, the funeral often treads close on the heels of the bridal, and in life's cup of joy "there floats the fennel's bitter leaf." But so shall it not be hereafter. The sun that shines on the Bride of the Lamb shall have no setting, and in the paradise of her future home no serpent's trail shall come, nor thorns or briars grow. And the voice said, "Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

John heard all that the voice proclaimed, and was overwhelmed by its communications. He lost his self-control, and at the feet of the angel who was his guide he fell to worship. This may show us that beyond a certain point we are unable to receive the revelation of future glory without injury to ourselves. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The veil of reserve cannot yet be removed but at our peril. Too much light may blind us, so that we fall into sin, as did the apostle

when he worshipped the angel. That worship of the creature would have been treason against the Creator. Belated superstition may teach men to pray to angels, or the sainted mother of Jesus, or to the spirits of just men made perfect. In a moment would they check the daring impiety, and cry, "See thou do it not; I am a fellow-servant with thee and thy brethren, who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy."

It may not be out of place to remind you at this point that we are still occupied with the fourth part of the book of Revelation, and that the central vision of this fourth part is that of the seven vials of plagues. But, before we reached that, we found there were some preliminary visions, exhibiting the dragon, and the two beasts, and the image. Now, having seen the overthrow of those who were blinded and deceived by this dragon and these beasts and the image set up, it is natural that we should expect some manifestation of judgment against these enemies themselves, who thus led others to their doom. Such manifestation is given. As there were three preliminary visions, so there are three supplementary. The first sets forth the doom of the two beasts; the second, that of the dragon; and the third describes the last great judgment. Thus there is a Divine order manifest throughout this section of the book. The character and power of the evil agencies that assail the Church are first presented. The condemnation of those who follow them is then set forth; and now, as we might expect, there is described the doom of the adversaries themselves. And having this, the representation is complete. John now beholds, in vision, the destruction of those who have destroyed others, for "Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet."

John again saw the already opened heaven, the scene of vision, and behold there came forth a rider, on a white horse, not as before the mere symbol of victory, but our Lord Himself. He that sat upon that horse was called Faithful and True—faithful inasmuch as every promise He makes He surely fulfils—and true also, for He is the truth itself—He is real in a world of shadows, not merely testifying to what is true, but being Himself in nature all His

name implies. Man may be faithful, yet not true; from policy or selfishness he may keep his word, yet be false at heart. In a world where the soul may misplace its confidence, taking shadows for reality, mere professions for genuine friendship, and glozing smiles for true heart-love, it is a blessed thing to have a Saviour, who is both faithful and true. Then, "in righteousness He doth judge and make war;" not meeting wrong by wrong, as when men in war let loose their darkest passions. He goes forth in righteousness, and on behalf of righteousness. This is the great need of humanity, and He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law. "His eyes were as a flame of fire," there flashed from them a light that filled the beholder with awe. So full of heavenly life and power were they as to unmask the most plausible disguises, so piercing as to discern the precious from the vile, the chaff from the wheat.

He is a royal conqueror. As the vesture, stained with the blood of His foes, fell over his form and rested on His thigh, there was seen written upon it the name, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. "On His head were many crowns," or rather, "many diadems." For of old the crown was the emblem not of royalty, but of highest joy and gladness, of glory and immortality. The diadem, which was a narrow fillet bound round the brow, was the indication of kingly rule; and the monarch had as many diadems as there were countries under his sway.* Our Saviour is also our King, and, as the Ruler of many provinces, on His head are many diadems. His state is right kingly, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords. By inheritance as the first-begotten of the Father, by the anointing of gladness, and by proclamation, He is King in Zion. As a king, He sends forth ambassadors, receives petitions, and dispenses

* Archbishop Trench ("New Testament Synonyms"), on the distinction between crown and diadem, quotes from Selden's "Titles of Honour" these words: "However those names have been from ancient time confounded, yet the diadem strictly was a very different thing from what a crown now is or was; and it was no other than only a fillet of silk, linen, or some such thing. Nor appears it that any other kind of crown was used for a royal ensign, except only in some kingdoms of Asia, but this kind of fillet, until the beginning of *Christianity* in the Roman empire."

image. Never more shall worldly civil power strive to sway the conscience,—never more shall blind guides mislead the unwary to their ruin,—never more shall the tyranny of a base, public opinion be a hindrance to the service of God. These all were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. Their overthrow was as complete as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, over the ancient sites of which, after fire and brimstone had come down from heaven, there flowed the waters of the Dead Sea, which, at its southern extremity, is “veiled with a deep haze, that to earlier ages gave the appearance of the smoke going up for ever and ever.” *

“And the remnant were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse.” For there were other enemies beside the beast and the false prophet. *Selfishness*, looking at everything as it may affect its own narrow interests. *Unbelief*, cold and shivering, yet glorying in its weakness, as it keeps on shouting the everlasting No. *Indifference*, looking on the ground for its satisfactions, instead of up to the heavens. *Superstition*, blear-eyed, and trembling with fear, in darkened bondage, and bereft of all joyful confidence. *Sensualism*, bartering its heavenly birthright for a mess of pottage. These are the foes of man and God, and these also shall one day be “slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceedeth out of his mouth.”

“Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord : awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon ? ”

“Awake, awake ; put on thy strength, O Zion ; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city : for henceforth there shall no more come unto thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. . . . Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem : for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations ; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

* “Sinai and Palestine,” p. 293.

XI.

THE MILLENNIUM.

REVELATION XX. 1-6.

"MEN have nowhere given up hoping; nor acquiesced in the world's evil as the world's law. Everywhere they have had a tradition of a time when they were nearer to God than now—a confident hope of a time when they should be brought nearer again." Amidst the conflicts and toils of the present, humanity has looked both to the past and the future for comfort. The poets have sung of a golden age gone by, and there has been a vague belief that the former days were better than these. And this dream of a better time in the past is not wholly a dream, but has its basis in fact. It is the unspent echo of sweetest music from the bowers of Eden, and it finds a response in human hearts because it recalls that state of innocence when there was nothing to hurt or destroy. And while men have thus glanced backward with regret, they have also looked forward with hope. In the darkest days they have seemed to see the beacon-fire of promise on the hill-tops of the future. Again and again have the hands that were hanging down been lifted up, in the confident expectation of a good time coming.

Is this expectation true and well-founded? Or is it merely a poet's dream? A poet's dream it may be, for this is often deeper and truer than the historian's facts. But it is not merely a dream; it is a good hope, founded on the assurance of Him who is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. The Lord not only sustains this hope, but was the first to give it birth. Scripture is jubilant with the expectation that "there shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the

mountains: the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." As the ancient prophet turned his face towards the future, it became bright with the light of coming glory. He declares that "the little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation, the Lord will hasten it in His time." In words of cheer he says to the Church, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." He bids her "lift up thine eyes round about and see all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." In that blessed time of peace the nations shall not vie with each other in building the most powerful ships of war, or in forging the most destructive artillery; for "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

And the glory that lit up the face of psalmist and prophet makes radiant the visions of the beloved disciple in the isle of Patmos. Having told us of that royal victor who went forth on the white horse, and who overthrew one enemy after another, he then describes what next he saw. On mighty wing there descended an angel from heaven, having in one hand the key of the bottomless pit, and in the other a powerful chain. And he laid hold of the dragon, that ancient serpent whose trail was in Paradise, that serpent which is the devil or the accuser, and Satan or the adversary, and bound him a thousand years, and cast

him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years shall be fulfilled. The saints are glad and triumph, reigning with their Lord. Thus Scripture throughout rings with the joyful promise that the earth shall have its golden age again.

In this general belief all Christian men agree and rejoice together. But when we come more closely to the question, there is very considerable diversity of opinion as to when and how that golden age shall dawn. One section of the Church believes that the millennial time of blessedness will be before the second coming of our Lord: while the other section contends that that second coming will usher in the millennium, that our Lord will appear in person, and reign on the earth with His saints.

In the course of these lectures, I have intentionally said as little as possible about the other interpretations of the book of Revelation that have been given, preferring rather, as I stated at the outset, to give only that which commends itself to my own judgment. In dealing with the millennium, however, I can hardly do so to any purpose without referring to the various opinions that are entertained concerning it. I have never been able to see my way to the millenarian belief in the "personal reign" of Christ on earth; but in speaking of it, I hope I shall not forget that it is the belief of some very devout and prayerful men whose Christian excellence wins my respect, even when their interpretation of Scripture fails to do so. I believe that they are in error, but in error that is based on a truth that was in danger of neglect, and which they have brought into prominence. They have lifted the eyes of the Church from the dust and conflict of the present, and directed her gaze more steadily to the great hope of Christ's second coming. For this we thank them, even while we part company with them; and let me say also, that if I reject their belief, it is not because it is too bright and too glowing, but because it is not bright and glowing enough. If my conception of Christ's kingdom were lower than theirs, I should feel at once that that was a fatal objection to it, and should abandon it for that reason alone. If I am not looking for that for which they are looking, it is because I am firmly persuaded "God has provided some better thing for us."

The history of the millenarian doctrine falls into three periods. The early Christians, suffering bitterly from the persecution of the heathen, looked for the near approach of Christ and the righting of their wrongs in an earthly kingdom, where the saints should have power. The blood of the martyrs was the seed, and the kingdom of Christ was to be the harvest. There was diversity of opinion, but the views of many of the early Christians were of a very sensuous sort, and extremely objectionable. In the Alexandrian Church Origen resisted this chiliasm, as it was then called—*chilias* being the Greek word, as *mille* is the Latin, for a thousand—and its influence began to decline. In the Roman Church it maintained a longer hold. But with Augustine arose the idea that the Church is the kingdom of God upon earth; and this teaching, together with the altered political position of the Church, led to the downfall of the doctrine. When persecution ceased, and Christianity came to sway the civil power, this was thought to be the victory promised, and men accepted this as the millennium for which they had waited. The end of the world was looked for at the end of the first thousand years after Christ, and there was little, if any, expectation of a visible earthly reign of the Messiah.

But with the Reformation there came a revival of the millenarian hope. The persecution by the papal power took the place of that by the pagan so many centuries before, and the martyrs looked for a speedy coming of Christ, and a speedy redemption of His Church. Many minds found signs of His coming in the wonders that were taking place among them, and a thousand tokens in heaven and earth were interpreted as heralding that coming. The Reformers cherished these expectations. But the Anabaptists and others had such gross views of the millennium, that the Protestant Church, in both its branches, was obliged to denounce their caricatures as Judaizing fanaticism. The Lutherans denounced them in the Augsburg, and the Reformers in the Helvetic Confession.* These denunciations settled the matter for the whole Church for a time, though there were a few here and there who continued to put forth the doctrine.

* Semisch in Herzog's "Real Encyklopädie."

The learned and devout Bengel introduced, in Germany, the third period of millenarianism. In 1740 he published his explanation of the Apocalypse. By calculations, of the truth of which he was very confident, he fixed 1835 as the date of the end of the world. In England, Joseph Mede had a century before revived the interest of the Church in millennial studies. By his book on the Apocalypse, he became really the father of the modern school of continuous historic interpretation, and ever since, more or less, there has prevailed the belief in Christ's personal reign with His saints on earth.

Those who hold this belief, trusting to certain calculations based on prophetic Scripture, say that we have reached the time of the end, and that we may almost any moment expect the second advent of our Lord. They trust to this for the conversion of the world, saying that the present agencies are only intended to spread the Gospel for a witness to all nations, and so to gather out an elect few. They say that the word and the Spirit, working through Christian institutions, are insufficient for the conversion of the world. Edward Irving, in his "Lectures on Prophecy," says:—"It will be shown to you from the word of God, I trust, that it is not by the progress of society, or the march of intellect, or the advancement of science; that it is not by the spread of modern opinions, or the rise and growth of liberal institutions; that it is not by means of schools, and hospitals, and peace societies, and temperance societies; no, nor even by means of Sunday-schools, and tract societies, and missions to the heathen, however good in their place these may be (and we have reason to thank God in many respects for these); it is not by these means that Satan's kingdom will be overthrown, that the world will be delivered from his dire oppression, and the universal reign of righteousness and peace be introduced; but 'by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.'" In conformity with this view they continually show that the world is growing worse and worse. In this boasted nineteenth-century light, superstition of the grossest kind, say they, grows rank, and the uprising and rapid spread of Mormonism and Spiritualism present prodigies so monstrous that we should regard them as impossible if we had not seen them. Then, looking upon the Church as it is as well as the world,

they note "the great and rapid spread of scepticism within its borders; the very limited extent to which Scripture is now, *by Christians*, read, studied, and heartily accepted; the feebleness of our faith generally; the all but complete obliteration of old distinctions between the Church and the world; the very low estimate formed by *outsiders* of the spirituality, disinterestedness, and general moral elevation of believers; and the unscriptural *idea* of Christianity which now dominates in religious society. Looking at these things in the Church, they see in them signs, not of advancement, but of an approaching catastrophe." They say there are special reasons for believing that the finger of prophecy points to 1866 or 1867 as the time of the second coming, when a very different state of things will be brought about. Then, at His coming, the dead saints shall be raised, and the living shall be changed, rising to meet Him in the air. To use their own words, "instantly on this, the earth's internal fires shall burst forth at a thousand orifices, the gases that compose our atmosphere shall ignite, the heavens and the earth shall melt with fervent heat, and the world, with the living wicked on it, and the dead wicked buried in it, shall be burned up." According to the prophecies of Zechariah, say they, our Lord shall appear, "and His feet shall stand upon the mount of Olives, which shall cleave beneath Him in the midst thereof." He shall then establish His court at Jerusalem, and shall, with the risen saints, reign there for a thousand years. The Jews, having been brought in with the fulness of the Gentiles, shall dwell in their own land, and thus Jesus shall literally sit upon the throne of His father David. According to the prophecy of Zechariah xiv., just referred to, it is said that the rest of the nations of the earth shall come up, either personally, or by deputy, to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem. Some even maintain that the ancient sacrifices will be revived for the instruction of the Church. But the main hope of their belief is that the Saviour shall literally sit upon His ancestral throne in the glory of His kingdom.

This is, on the whole, a fair statement of millenarian belief. There are perplexing differences among them, being almost as many variations of opinion as there are writers,

but in substance I think I have presented the main features of the school to which they all belong. Let me now say a word or two on a few of the principal points thus advanced.

And first on the matter of the *dates* that have been fixed. I do not hesitate to say that these have not a particle of evidence from Scripture on which to rest. It has been a favourite belief, that as the work of creation is represented as being completed in six days, the seventh being a Sabbath, and as it is said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, the world would last seven thousand years, the last thousand years being the Sabbath of the millennium; and as the world, according to the calculation of some chronologists, has lasted about six thousand years already, we are therefore on the eve of the seventh millenary period. But no one will surely maintain that this is a fair application of Peter's words, when he said that with the Lord a thousand years are but as one day, and one day as a thousand years. I need hardly say that he was then sublimely affirming that all periods are equally present to the Infinite mind. This, and nothing more than this, was intended. It seems to me vastly more probable—for, when Scripture is silent, probabilities are all that any man can advance—that the world will continue for many thousands of years yet. It must be remembered that before Christ came, the work of preparation for His coming lasted four thousand years; and it is very likely, to say the least, that the period prepared for will be longer than the period of preparation. But on both sides this is mere guessing, without much ground to go upon; and we must leave it.

The more common mode of calculation with the millenarians is this: it is said that a prophetic day sometimes means a year, and that when John, in the Apocalypse, speaks of the wilderness state of the Church as 1260 days, he means really 1260 natural years; and as the Papacy was established in 606, when the Emperor Phocas declared the pope the head of all the Churches, and sole universal bishop, we thus reach 1866 as the time when this wicked one shall be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's appearing. Or thus Dr. Cumming reaches his famous conclusions. In a letter published a few years ago he says, "I have collected, from a comparison of the prophetic dates of Daniel and the

- * Apocalypse with historic facts, that the first great period of 1260 years began in A.D. 530, or when the civil power invested the Roman pontiff with imperial and civil as well as hierarchical jurisdiction. It ended in 1790, as it began in 530, at which period the Papacy ceased to be an absolutely dominant power. Daniel tells us that two distinct periods of time are to be added to this last—one of thirty years, and another of forty-five. Adding thirty, we find that we land at the beginning of the drying up of the Euphrates, or wasting of the Mahometan dynasty in Europe; viz., A.D. 1820. Add to 1820 the second period of forty-five years specified by Daniel, and we arrive at 1865, at the end of which Daniel says, He that cometh is blessed." As we are now in 1866, and nothing very special has yet happened, I presume this calculation will require, and may possibly have received, revision. But mark how utterly worthless is the whole process of calculation from beginning to end. I will say nothing now of the sufficiency of what I take to be the more scriptural explanation of the 1260 days already given in the fourth lecture. I will simply deal with the mode of reckoning here adopted. And, first of all, it is by no means probable, much less is it certain, that a prophetic day means a natural year, and that therefore the 1260 days are 1260 years. For what is the proof advanced? The spies sent forth to Canaan searched the land forty days, and Israel, for their unbelief, were to wander in the wilderness as many years. "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years" (Num. xiv. 34). Again, Ezekiel was bidden of the Lord to lie on his left side 390 days, and bear the iniquity of Israel. "For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, 390 days; so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel" (Ezek. iv. 5). It is said that in each of these passages a day represents a year; to which I answer, Yes, a day *represents* a year, but in each case "a day" means a day, and not a year. Because in these instances a day is openly stated to typify a year, it is surely a long step to take when it is assumed that *therefore* everywhere in prophetic Scripture, without any such statement, we are to conclude that a day means a year. But

perhaps the strongest proof in favour of the year-day theory is the passage in Daniel ix. 24, where it is said, "*Seventy weeks* are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." Now it is admitted on all hands that a period of 490 years is here signified by the seventy weeks, and therefore it is said a day stands for a year, seventy weeks being 490 days. But the reply is that the original words are simply these, "*Seventy sevens* are determined," etc. We happen to know that seventy sevens of years are meant; but, in fact, neither days nor years are mentioned. To show that the word for "seven" does not always imply a week of days, there are passages where the word "days" is added when a week is intended. There are two instances in the second and third verses of the very next chapter. It seems to me that the proof that a day means a year utterly breaks down.

It is sheer guessing, then, to say that the 1260 days mean 1260 years; and even if it were not, no one seems to know when we ought to begin to count them. The starting-point is a purely arbitrary one. We have seen that Dr. Cumming chooses 530 A.D., because he says the pope was then invested with civil and imperial power; Faber, Seiss, and others prefer 606, when the Emperor Phocas declared the pope to be head of all the Churches; while Newton could not make up his mind between 727, 755, 774, and 787. Between the first and last date there is a difference of more than two centuries and a half! And even if they were all agreed, there remains what seems to me the absurdity of supposing that the Divine dispensations would be arranged to count from the formal decree of a Roman emperor, or from the time when the pope broke away from the Eastern emperor, or obtained the exarchate of Ravenna. The Divine counsels are far more deeply rooted in the nature of things than that.

I cannot now dwell upon the unwarrantable and unphilosophical plan of lengthening out the 1260 days, as Dr. Cumming does, by adding to them the additional thirty days and forty-five days mentioned by the prophet Daniel. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, while they

occasionally use the same symbols, have a widely different purpose, and bear on totally different events. The one is concerned with Jewish history, and, as we have seen, has been literally fulfilled; the other describes, in symbol, the spiritual future of the Church of God. But I must now leave this question of the dates and calculations of the millenarians, and in doing so can only express astonishment that they have found acceptance so long.

Let me now advert to the statement that *Christ's second coming will be for the conversion of the world*. It has been said, as we have seen, that the means at work during the present dispensation are wholly inadequate to this end, and that in fact both the Church and the world are growing worse instead of better. On the present spiritual condition of the race, as compared with the past, we none of us have accurate data for judgment; and therefore there will be differences of opinion. To the Lord alone all hearts are naked and open, and He alone knows perfectly the ebb and flow of spiritual life among men. But, looking at the facts as far as we can reach them, I come to a more cheerful conclusion than the one I have mentioned. I admit that our age has its special spiritual dangers, from the increase of activity, of wealth and luxury. But no age of the Christian Church has been without its peculiar perils and discipline. I see also that there are deadly errors ripening, and serious conflicts coming. But, on the other hand, there are features of the times that are intensely hopeful. I hold that even the sceptical books that have appeared and made a stir through the land are not tokens of a declining, but of an increasing spirit of inquiry as to the things of God. They are signs that the tide of truth is rising, and flooding those bays of human thought where for so long there has been a mere stretch of foul and barren beach. Christianity is certainly not retiring from our literature, our legislation, or our social life; but rather under its influence society is growing more just and more humane. It is more resolutely bent on grappling with the dreadful evils that were gnawing at its heart. Moreover, the Church is, with an energy hitherto unparalleled, carrying out schemes for meeting the spiritual wants of the people; and there are many things done and doing for which every

Christian heart will be devoutly grateful to God. It is very possible that some old modes of life and action which have been regarded as part and parcel of Christianity, but which were, in fact, only part and parcel of ourselves, will pass away. But the Spirit of God is a creative Spirit, and the life that He implants will have its own mode of development. There are very many things about our religious societies, and much that is human about our Churches, that might vanish away without any very great cause for regret. I think we are on the eve of losing a good many things, the loss of which will be a great gain to the true life of the Church. We may have less reverence for human inventions, but we shall have all the more for God's great verities afterwards. These external matters I hold lightly; but I do maintain that God's Spirit, working through God's word, as it is read or spoken, is with ever-increasing power bringing sinful men within the sphere of His influence who is the Life of the world. The Divine working in these days does not show itself precisely in the forms of the past; but it is mighty and living, and, after all, life is the grand thing. In coming to a right judgment on the efficacy or otherwise of the present means employed for the conversion of the world, let us not forget that 4000 years rolled away ere Christ appeared, and scarcely half that period has gone by since. Let us not overlook the manifest preparation going on slowly but surely in the heathen world. Men have begun to doubt the truth of the superstitions of their fathers; ancient systems of darkness are tottering to their fall. By-and-bye it may not be an exaggeration to speak of a nation being born in a day. So it may seem when the event comes, and yet the greater part of the work may have been silently going on out of sight, in the midst of a generation that believed there was little or nothing doing for the salvation of the world. I am not at all prepared to admit the work to be so hopeless at present that we can expect nothing for the world till Christ shall, in bodily form, appear on the earth again. We have Him with us now,—with us by the Spirit,—with us in the form He Himself declared to be most for our advantage. He said to His disciples, "*It is expedient for you that I go away.*" He speaks of great

spiritual works being accomplished, not through His bodily presence, but through His mediation and the descent of the Spirit which He would shed forth. Pointing to His miracles, He declares of the believer, "Greater works than these shall he do, *because I go unto my Father.*" Moreover, it is nowhere said that Christ's coming will be for the conversion of the world, except in such passages as this, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son," words that, without any straining, admit of a purely spiritual interpretation. But on the contrary, Christ's second coming is distinctly stated to be for very different purposes. So far from the Church being then at its worst state, and the world needing to be converted, the Church shall then be complete, and shall be presented to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He shall then "come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed." He will then come, not to commence the salvation of His people, but to complete it. "Our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour, who shall change the body of our humiliation, and fashion it like to the body of His glory, by that energy with which He is able to subject all things to Himself." All this is quite in the spirit of the rest of Scripture. When Christ comes again it will not be to convert, but to judge. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . Then shall He say unto them on His left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and

shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." So runs the strain ; and whether the means now in operation be sufficient or insufficient to convert the world, it is manifest that Scripture says nothing of Christ's personal presence accomplishing that end. When He comes again, it will not be as at first to seek and save the lost, but to be glorified in His saints, to wake the sleeping dead, and to execute judgment upon a world which has reached its end.

It may be said, it has been said, " If the world is to be converted before Christ come, if, ere He appear, the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, then His coming cannot be near ; and yet men are bidden to watch for it as if it were." I can only answer that the first disciples were as urgently commanded to watch for His appearing as are we ; still 1800 years have rolled by, and His second coming is not yet. They also were bidden to watch, I repeat, though His personal advent was not near ; for in truth there are other and nearer forms of His coming, for which we are all to be prepared. He comes in life, He comes in death ; He comes in mercy, He comes in judgment ; yet too often He passes by, and blind eyes behold Him not ; therefore it is said, " Watch, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." It has been well said, " When brighter light breaks on the world's darkness,—when old errors die, and old wrongs are abolished,—when the spirit of fervid piety gains full sway of Christian hearts, and the Church is wholly consecrated in time, talent, purse, and purpose to the Lord,—all this will be in answer to that inspired prayer, ' Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! ' "

Let me now, as briefly as I can, refer to that other important aspect of millenarian belief—the *personal reign of Christ on earth*.

I have already said that there are some who take literally those words in the book of Zechariah, " And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall

cleave in the midst thereof, toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, King of Judah; and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." It is believed that He will thus establish His court at Jerusalem, and with His risen saints reign there for a thousand years. Thus shall He literally sit upon the throne of His father David. With respect to the words of Zechariah, (chap. xiv.) I may just say that we can hardly insist upon interpreting a book so full of visions and symbols quite literally. Or, if we thus literally understand one part of this chapter, we must take the rest literally too, and we shall then meet with insuperable difficulties. There is, perhaps, some light given in a passage from the prophet Micah (i. 3, 4), where he says, "Behold the Lord cometh forth out of His place, and will tread upon the high places of the land. And the mountains shall be molten under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft." These words relate to the Assyrian invasion, and were then fulfilled. Jehovah did not, however, *literally* "tread upon the high places of the land," nor were the "valleys" *literally* "cleft." Without going more fully into this 14th chapter of Zechariah, which is beside my purpose now, it seems to me that its purport is sufficiently described when it is said that the prophet declares "that as the result of the advent of Messiah there should be a removal of the obstacles that prevented the accession of the Gentiles to the Church; that the gospel should then be diffused among all nations; and that the time should eventually come, when, to use the language of Isaiah, 'Many people would go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.'"* But—to pass by this to the main question—it is said that Christ will come to establish His kingdom; to which I reply that kingdom is already established, and a very serious evil flowing from millenarianism is that it dis-

* "What saith the Scripture?" By W. P. Lyon, B.A.

putes this. It is not because the kingdom is limited in its influence, that they say it is not as yet set up. Dr. Leask says; "Let us imagine the issue of Christian ministry—a Christianised globe, every land basking in the Sun of righteousness, every language sending up its daily anthems of adoration to the Saviour, and every form of idolatry, superstition, injustice, oppression, and moral wrong abolished from the rising to the setting of the sun. I ask, *What then?* Would not this satisfy the royal rights of the Lord Jesus? Would not this fulfil all the predictions on the pages of both Testaments regarding His kingdom and dominion? And would not this entirely supersede the doctrine of the *pre-millennial* advent, and prove conclusively that those who had taught it had all along laboured under a mistake? I answer, No!—*emphatically, earnestly, No!*" It is maintained that "the visible presence of the King" is essential to "the proper character of the kingdom of Christ." And because He is not visibly and bodily present, they say His kingdom is not yet set up. But, on the other hand, Scripture most plainly declares that by His resurrection and ascension Christ was exalted to be king. It is said that God the Father "raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet" (Eph. i. 20–22). Peter, speaking of Christ, says, "Him hath God exalted to be a *Prince* and a Saviour." And, on the day of Pentecost, the drift of his argument was strongly in the same direction. He shows that the promise to David was that Christ should sit on his throne, and that that was fulfilled at the resurrection of Christ. "Being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne: He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ." Peter then goes on to say that "this Jesus hath God raised up," that He is already "by the right hand of God exalted." He argues that David is not ascended into the heavens: "but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until

I make Thy foes Thy footstool." So far from the second coming of our Lord being the time when He shall enter upon His kingdom, it is rather the time when He will deliver it up to God, even the Father. "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet." And mark this—"The *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Believe me, Christ is already king, and His kingdom will for ever grow in grandeur and power as the years roll on.

The notion of the personal reign has always seemed to me to degrade the relation of Christ with His followers. It is not merely, as I think, contrary to the letter of Scripture, but vastly more opposed to its loftier spirit. There are many who believe it will be vastly better for the world and the Church when Christ shall live again on earth in a body, and be visible as in body. They know not what manner of spirit they are of. Let them ponder the words of Dr. Bushnell. If Christ come in the body, "He will of course be here or there in space, a locally present being at some particular geographic point—Jerusalem, or London, or Rome—or going about in all places by turns. Hearing now that He is here or there, we shall think no more of seeing Him by faith, and begin to think of seeing Him with our eyes. Every ship that sails will be crowded with eager multitudes pressing on to see the visible Christ. Thronging in thus, month by month, a vast seething crowd of pilgrims, curious and devout, poor and rich, houseless all and hungry, trampling each other, many of them sick, not one of them in the enjoyment truly of God's peace, not one of a thousand getting near enough to see Him, still fewer to hear Him speak,—how long will it take, under such kind of experience, to learn what Christ intended, and the solid truth of it when He said, 'It is expedient for you that I go away?' Nothing would be more inexpedient, or a profounder affliction, than a locally descended, permanently visible Saviour. . . . There is nothing, I must frankly say, that would be so nearly a dead loss of Christ to any disciple who knows Him in the dear companionship of faith, as to have Him come in visible

show ; either setting up His reign at some geographic point, or reigning aërially in some fitting and cursitating manner which cannot be traced. How beautifully accessible is He now everywhere, present to every heart that loves Him ; consciously dear, as friend, consoler, guide, and stay, in all conditions ; close at hand in every sinking ship in the uttermost parts of the sea ; the sweet joy of dungeons underground, where there is no light to see Him in a body ; immediately and all diffusively present, to comfort every sorrow, support every persecution, and even to turn away the tempting thought before it comes." *

And, overwhelming as are these difficulties in the path to a belief in a literal personal reign of Christ on earth, they are not the only ones. Some of the millenarians—for there is perplexing diversity among them here—first state that the present constitution of things will be wholly changed, and then unconsciously assume that it will continue as it is. We are told that when Christ comes in the clouds of heaven, "The earth having given up the silent dust of the saints, then the fire that is treasured up in the very centre of the earth shall burst forth at ten thousand crevices,—‘the elements shall melt as with fervent heat,’—the solid rocks shall blaze as if they were wax, and the rivers as if they were oil ; and the weary old earth, having undergone the ordeal of the last fire, shall regain its pristine purity, and become fit for the immediate presence of the descending Saviour and His risen saints." So writes Dr. Cumming ; and in this he is borne out by the apostle Peter, who tells us, in a book which is simply didactic and not symbolic, that "in the day of the Lord the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Yet, after such stupendous changes as these, it is quietly assumed that Jerusalem will be where it was, that Palestine will continue as before, and the Jews go up to dwell in their own land ; and, since we are to take the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah literally, thither will all the nations of the earth repair to keep the feast of tabernacles ! The earth and all its works shall be burned up : yet we are told of the amazing facilities

* "Christ and His Salvation," pp. 298 *et seq.*

for modern intercourse which Palestine will still possess after the kingdom is there established; and we are told that "it is not easy to estimate the commercial grandeur to which a kingdom may attain, planted as it were on the very apex of the Old World, with its three continents spreading out beneath its feet, and with the Red Sea on one side to bring in all the golden treasures and spicy harvests of the East, and the Mediterranean floating in on the other side all the skill and enterprise and knowledge of the West."

In all that is said about the earthly kingdom, it is also forgotten that a change shall pass on man as marvellous as that which shall pass over the earth at Christ's second coming. In the course of his sublime argument on the resurrection, in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle shows that man will hereafter have a spiritual body. Just as there are different kinds of flesh in the natural bodies of earthly creatures, so there are bodies terrestrial and bodies celestial, and the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. Man will have his natural body first, and his spiritual body after. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore these must be laid aside, and there will be a resurrection. Every man in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's *at His coming*. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, as the trumpet sounds that heralds His approach, shall the spiritual body be assumed. At His coming shall the vital change be made, and then all the affinities of man's bodily nature shall be with a spiritual state. Yet, according to the millenarian theory, the risen saints are to live and reign in a world still fitted to an earthly body, for the Jews are to live in the literal Palestine, Jerusalem is to have its "*commercial grandeur*," and "*golden treasures and spicy harvests*" will come by way of the Red Sea for her use. Moreover, if the saints only are to rise and reign, those yet to be converted will still be in fleshly bodies. Thus there will be two orders of beings living together in the same world; one order having bodies of flesh and blood, and bound by earthly conditions, and the other order having spiritual bodies, and raised above those conditions.

Then, again, there is yet another difficulty in the millenarian's path. According to Scripture, as we have seen, at Christ's second coming the dead will rise and judgment will be declared. Thus the final spiritual state of mankind will have commenced. And if Christ's coming be before the millennium, then the millennium will be the beginning of the perfect spiritual state and blessedness of believers. And yet this twentieth chapter of the Revelation says that *after* the millennium has reached its end there will be a relapse. "When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth." If, then, pre-millennialism be true, sin shall prevail even after the old world is burned up and the new world has come; there shall be another fall, even after the spiritual body is assumed and the glorified state has come. The utter hopelessness which such a belief brings in, no words can describe.

I have at such length spoken of the difficulties of pre-millenarianism, that I fear I shall have very little time indeed for reference to the positive aspects of the chapter before us, to which we must now return. John saw Satan bound, and shut up in the abyss for a thousand years. With what sort of chain he shall be bound, we are led to see when it is said that he should deceive the nations no more. When worldly power is overthrown, false teaching checked, and public opinion purified, then shall there come to every land a long and blessed period when the powers of darkness shall be crippled. I trust that we have already entered too deeply into the spirit of this symbolic book to suppose that a thousand literal years are meant by the millennium. The Church has her 1260 days of sorrow; but her time of peace and victory shall be as a thousand years to these 1260 days. For a vast and lengthened period shall the malignant spirit of evil be deprived of his power to hurt or destroy.

During this time when truth shall be victorious, those who lived before the millennium, having risen to the heavenly state, shall there live and reign with Christ during the long interval before His second coming. John "saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were be-

headed for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." In blessed fellowship with their Lord, they waited for His second coming to the earth. This is the first resurrection—a rising to be with Christ. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Taking these words as they stand, there is nothing in them to indicate a descent of Christ to the earth, but rather an ascent of faithful souls to live and reign with Him. These witnesses of Christ, who had tried to better the earth when they were on it, and had often seemed to try in vain, shall, as their reward, exercise upon it an influence they have not had before. They shall live with Christ, and with Him they shall reign. The rest of the dead lived not* through all that lengthened period of the thousand years. Existence had they, but not life in its high and blessed sense. Their life, in so far as life means enjoyment, was earth-bound, and had vanished away.

For saintly souls who depart in the faith, then, there shall be a triumphant reign with Christ; and for the earth, which they leave behind, there shall be a millennial rest from the inroads of the enemy, though not, it may be, an absolute freedom from the power of sin. Drawing nearer and still nearer is that better time. It will, most probably, be ushered in by fierce conflicts. Even now the hosts are gathering to the field, and it is time for every man to gird his sword upon his thigh. But after the storm there shall come a calm, deep and tranquil,—blessed foretaste of the rest of heaven. The golden age shall return with the dawn of the millennial day.

"Once the welcome light has broken,
Who can say
What the unimagined glories
Of the day?
What the evil that shall perish
In its ray?"

* Not "lived not *again*."

I will not attempt to paint, in all its glowing colours, the picture of the millennial future. Its merest outlines I can suggest only in part.

I can imagine that man will have regained his lost supremacy over nature, that pain will be mitigated by the further discoveries of science, that many of the inroads of disease will be arrested, and that poverty and pauperism will flee the earth.

It is surely not chimerical to hope that then the fearful social evils which are the reproach of our modern civilization will have ceased for ever, that business will be purified so as to be no longer the enthronization of self, and that thus common life will become sacred, having inscribed thereon "Holiness to the Lord."

We are told that ignorance shall flee the earth; men's minds shall be enlarged by the growth of knowledge; best of all, they shall become spiritually enlightened. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. "In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Then also shall Israel be brought in with the fulness of the Gentiles. Whether they shall or shall not go back to Palestine is a matter of very small import; but "they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn," and that is of mighty moment. The veil shall be taken from Israel's heart, and the Deliverer shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? And if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?

The wide world o'er also there shall be lasting peace, and the true brotherhood of the nations. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

And, to crown the whole, there shall be a rich outpouring of spiritual power and glory. Universal holiness there may not be, for tares and wheat shall both grow together until the harvest, and the harvest is the end of the world. Absolute perfection belongs to the heavenly, not to the earthly state. But extraordinary times of revival may cease to be extraordinary, and the tide of Divine life flow through the midst of the nations full and strong. The Church shall have her joy in the Lord, in measure such as she has never had it yet. Not the few, but the many shall seek their all in God. The day of liberty for which weary watchers, like sentinels of the night, have long looked, shall dawn at length. The sad *miserere* of a sin-stricken world shall rise to notes of gladness. The earth shall yield her increase, and the Saviour shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

"It was not then a poet's dream,—
 An idle vaunt of song,
 Such as beneath the moon's soft gleam
 On vacant fancies throng,—

Which bids us see in heaven and earth,
 In all fair things around,
 Strong yearnings for a blest new birth,
 With sinless glories crowned;

Which bids us hear, at each sweet pause
 From care and want and toil,
 When dewy eve her curtain draws
 Over the day's turmoil,

In the low chant of wakeful birds,
 In the deep weltering flood,
 In whispering leaves,—these solemn words—
 'God made us all for good.'"

XII.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE.

REVELATION xx. 7-15.

IN our recent meditations on this book, we have been as they that watch for the morning—the morning of the millennial day. We are now to look at the gathering clouds, as the day sinks into darkness and the midnight cry is heard, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.” After the millennial day has dawned, there shall be a long reign of rest and peace for the weary earth. Right shall be triumphant over wrong. God’s way shall be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. And yet through all this the element of sin shall never be wholly wanting. Long centuries shall pass away, and many generations live on earth in the sunlight of God’s countenance; but at length the reaction of evil shall begin to work. Even in paradise the tempter whispered his dark suggestions, and ere the end shall come he shall make one struggle more. “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

Let me first explain the allusion to Gog and Magog, and then we shall the better understand the symbolic language here employed.

In these days, when speaking of the world's civilization, we are in the habit of contrasting the East and the West. We think of the West as the centre of enterprise, wealth, and power. We regard the East as a dull and lifeless world, out of which the grander elements of national greatness have died away. But, in centuries far gone by, the great contrast was not between East and West, but between North and South. The great mountain barrier stretching from the Alps to the Himalaya, and embracing the Hæmus, the Taurus, and the Caucasus, formed in the ancient world the grand separating line between barbarism and civilization. South of that line there were the great empires of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, Babylon, and Nineveh—all the great political powers of those times. But north of that line, stretching away over the vast plains beyond, there were barbarian tribes that every now and then stood on that mountain line, gazing on the wealth and comfort of the sunny south. Ofttimes, too, bow and spear in hand, they came on like a swarm of locusts, finding a garden before them, and leaving a wilderness behind them. Fierce, uncouth, fur-clad forms, and fierce as their own wolves or bears, they were the terror of the South. All the world knows that about 1400 years ago they thundered at the gates of Rome, and that proud city fell before them. But, long, long before that, these savage hordes had more than once rushed down upon the seats of luxury and power. From Herodotus and Strabo we learn that, some five-and-twenty centuries ago, one division of them broke into Syria. They penetrated, on their way to Egypt, as far as the southern frontier of Palestine, and were then bought off by Psammetichus, and retired, after sacking the temple of Asarte at Ascalon. But this was not the last inroad they made upon the land of Israel. There was another in the interval between the Old and New Testament times, which was attended with terrible consequences to themselves. It was beheld by Ezekiel beforehand, and it is in the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of his prophecy that we have the fullest intimations concerning it. The second verse of the thirty-eighth chapter reads thus: "Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, *the chief prince of* Mesech and Tubal, and prophesy against him." In the

margin there is this amended translation given: "Set thy face against Gog (the prince of) Magog, *the prince of Rosh, Mesech, and Tubal.*" So that the words translated "the chief prince" should be translated "prince of Rosh." The Rosh were known to the Arabians as the *Rûs*, and are undoubtedly the fathers of the modern Russian nation; while Mesech and Tubal are the Moschi and Tibereni who occupied territories near the Caucasus. Now the prophet first sees, in vision, the revival of Israel's power, and then, in their time of security, a terrific inroad upon them of these barbarian tribes, under the leadership of Gog, their prince. "Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God; In that day, when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: and thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land." Then, after the prophecy of their coming, there follows a description of their overthrow. These shepherds of the north, a wild host, with bow and spear, should come with a shout like the voice of a stormy sea. But God should meet and repel them. Their overthrow should be terrible. The glens of the Dead Sea should be piled up with the slain; vultures and wild beasts should be glutted with human flesh. It would seem as if they were to be stricken by lightning, accompanied with fearful storm, and, in their consternation, each man should turn his sword against his fellow. "Every man's sword shall be against his brother, and I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood: and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone." As when the angel of death swept past, and left the army of Sennacherib stiffened corpses on the field, so this overthrow should be accomplished by the special interposition of Heaven. All that Israel had to do was to stand still and see the salvation of God, and then go forth out of their cities, and gather the spoil. With javelin pole and shaft of spear, with bows and arrows, and with chariots of war left useless by that army of the dead, they should make their fires full many a year.

"So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire." It should take months to bury these vast hordes of northern warriors. They should come against Israel, but only to find a grave in her land. In the place appointed, "there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude; and they shall call it the valley of Hamon-gog."

This, then, is the historical basis of the symbol of Gog and his subjects of Magog in the vision of John. It is true we have no reference to this inroad except in the pages of Ezekiel; but this need not surprise us when it is remembered that after Nehemiah we have scarcely a glimpse of Hebrew history for centuries. I have not a shadow of doubt that as Daniel, in vision, saw the devastations of Antiochus Epiphanes, so, in vision too, Ezekiel saw the oncoming storm of northern warriors who in after years should appear in the land. Thus both events were used to furnish symbols for the future history of the Church of God.

These barbarous tribes should appear when least expected, and should overrun a land that was dwelling in security, never dreaming of danger—"Thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell confidently, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ezek. xxxviii. 11). As it was in those days in Israel, so shall it be in the last days. The long reign of truth and righteousness, the long millennial rest will have made the Church unsuspecting of danger. "She will dwell confidently, without walls of defence, and having neither bars nor gates." Yet the evil that has never been wholly destroyed will be gathering force. While good is in the ascendant it will scarcely dare to show itself. It will bend reluctantly, with hate in the heart; but yet it will bend. But after a time it will grow bolder; Satan will be loosed from his prison, and go forth to deceive those that have lived outside the Church's borders, separated from her life by hard and stony hearts, as the northern tribes were separated from the southern civilization by mountain barriers. He shall deceive them, and gather them together to battle. This outbreak shall come after a time of reaction and declension in the Church her-

self. There shall be a great multitude of these enemies, and they shall go up on the breadth of the earth, and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.

It is not in this chapter alone that we read of this terrible reaction after a long reign of spiritual peace and blessing. Again and again we are forewarned that there shall come a falling away first, ere the day of Christ arrive. And possibly out of this last apostasy there shall be brought to the front "that man of sin, the son of perdition"—the great Antichrist of all, of whom Paul wrote in his epistle to the Thessalonians. When he who now letteth is taken out of the way, when the restraining influence is gone, and Satan let loose again, "Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall *destroy with the brightness of His coming.*" When Christ shall appear the second time, it shall be to a scoffing world that has begun to ask jeeringly, Where is the promise of His coming? "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." Thinking of anything rather than of His appearing, the tribes of the earth shall mourn as they see the sign of the Son of man in heaven. In the midst of sensual delights shall the apostate earth be found at the dread hour of doom. "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed." Then shall the great foe of man and God enter upon his final doom—"And the devil that deceived the earth was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. At His appearing shall be held the great assize. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave* delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and the grave* were cast into the lake of fire—this is the

* The authorized version translates "death and hell," taking *hades* to mean hell. "Grave" gives a far better meaning, and is quite in accordance with Scripture usage. I may here say that never in Scripture do *scheol* or *hades* mean the common separate state of departed spirits both bad and good. *Scheol*, which is the precise equivalent in Hebrew for the Greek *hades*, occurs 64 times in the Old Testament. By the LXX. it is translated in 58 places by *αἴδης*, in 4 places by *θάνατος*, and in the remaining two there is a considerable variation from the Hebrew text so that nothing can be inferred. In the English version *scheol* is rendered 31 times by "grave," 29 times by "hell," three times by "pit," and once by "death." I have tabulated all these passages, and they may be divided thus—(1) The great majority of them, from their connection, can only mean the grave, the literal local grave. (2) There are a few passages closely related to these, and yet slightly different, since they do not so much refer to the actual local grave as to the state of bodily death in the abstract. (3) In some few places *scheol* seems to give the idea of intense mental or bodily suffering in this life. And (4) in a very few instances the idea that *scheol* contains of the darkness of the grave deepens into fearful intensity, and the word then applies to the place of lost souls—Gehenna itself.

In the New Testament, *hades* occurs eleven times, the twelfth instance in the *Textus receptus*—"O *hades*, where is thy victory?" having very decisive manuscript authority against it and in favour of reading *θάνατος* twice. Of these eleven passages, four refer undoubtedly to the world of the lost, or to the powers of darkness; the remaining seven referring to the grave as the receptacle of the dead. Nowhere is the *spirit* of the good man spoken of as being in *hades*. The common idea that *hades* is the general abode of disembodied spirits, both good and bad, may be classical, but it is not scriptural; and there is a wide difference between these two things. In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,

second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

We thus come to the great events of the greatest day in human history. Those events had a prominent place in the teaching of the first preachers, and were described both to serious listeners and scornful mockers. Felix, in the midst of his sins, is told of a judgment to come; and Athenians on Mars Hill are urged to look at life in earnest, because "God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead." The course of earthly life shall have a strange interruption and ending. With a rallying signal shout the Lord shall suddenly descend, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the living shall be changed and their natural bodies transformed into spiritual. Nor shall the living alone respond to the shout of the archangel. All that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. The dead shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation. The new body shall be an outgrowth from the old, as the stalk and ear of wheat are from the grain which was buried in the earth and rotted there. The sea shall yield up its dead, and the graves their long silent tenantry, that all may give in their life account before the great white throne.

Peter's argument about Christ's descent into *hades* is fully met by referring this to the burial of our Saviour's body. Peter shows that the original passage in the sixteenth Psalm—"For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption"—could not apply to David, for he says, "He is both *dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.*" All that Peter is insisting on is that God had raised up Jesus from the dead. If it be objected that it is said that our Lord's *soul* ($\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$) was not left in *hades*, I answer that in the LXX., from which Peter quoted, $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$ in several places can only mean the *body*, and not the spiritual nature at all; e.g., in Numbers vi. 6, it is said of the Nazarite, "All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no *dead body*;" in Leviticus xxi. 11, it is said, "Neither shall the high-priest go in to any *dead body*;" and in Haggai ii. 13, it is asked "If one that is unclean by a *dead body* touch any of these, shall it be unclean?" In each of these passages $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$ is the original word, and "body" is manifestly the correct translation.

"When the trumpet's thrilling tone,
Through the tombs of ages gone,
Summons all before the throne,

Death and time shall stand aghast,
And creation at the blast
Rise to answer for the past :

Then the volume shall be spread,
And the writing shall be read
Which shall judge the quick and dead."

We are awed as we think of that which is before us all ; and we are bewildered as much as we are awed. On that one day of final account how can there be an examination of each man's life, of all the myriads that have peopled the earth ? It is clear that the procedure at that great assize will be something very different from that of any earthly tribunal. Every man's spiritual history will pass under review as in a moment, and the verdict will be perfect in its justice, final, and decisive. But how will judgment be given ?

Perhaps the great facts of our present life may help us with some guiding thoughts ; for in truth every day is a day of judgment, and that last great day of all will be as the consummation of what has gone before. A man never does anything, either good or bad, without receiving in himself instant judgment. It tells back upon him, and shapes his being. The judgment of others may be very false. But the judgment recorded by the act itself is true and unerring. We bear about with us to-day the result of bygone days. Our present feelings, our strength or weakness, our present modes of dealing with the duties of life are in some sense the retributions of the past. God's judgment upon our life is not a mere winding-up at last. There is a daily balancing, and each day shows itself in the one that follows. The most solemn fact that I know, and yet perhaps the one most overlooked is, that a man *becomes* the sin he commits or the good he does. It enters into his being, and is God's judgment for good or evil then and there. On the one hand the children of light are changed into actual light ; and on the other the children of darkness become the darkness they have chosen. You see every day how when a man has yielded to sin it follows him. If he would

stop it will not let him. It drives him on and down. It becomes part of his life, and entangles him more and more at every step. So far as a man has yielded to sin, so far does his spiritual nature bear the mark upon it. And on the other hand, precisely the opposite is the case with goodness. God's judgment upon man then is not the mere pronouncing of a verdict either one way or the other, as man's judgment upon man may be. Human tribunals may judge a guilty man innocent, or an innocent man guilty; therefore it is a small matter to be judged of man. But God's judgment is the actual moral condition itself—the wretched weakness which sin has brought, or the joyful strength which obedience gives.

Now the day of judgment will be a day of open declaration of what a man is. The apostle says, "We must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ," or rather, as the word he uses implies, we must all be manifested—seen to be what we are. There is something of this also met with in this world. A man goes on indulging in some sensual vice; and little by little the awful fact begins to be written in the lines of his face. However careful he may be, there is no such thing as perfect concealment. Selfish cunning on the one hand, and generous frankness on the other, sensual indulgence and high-minded self-restraint, impurity of mind and purity, meanness and honour—how these sooner or later show themselves in the life. They are revealed in the most unexpected ways—by the glance of the eye, the expression of the face, the dropping of a word, the gait of the body. In the long run, most men are revealed to others by themselves, and righteously judged. Now if that be the case here, the revelation hereafter will be more perfect. If the spiritual nature can sometimes be discerned through a body of flesh and blood, how much more may this be the case when the spirit shall have a spiritual body the exact counterpart and expression of itself? Truly, in that great day, that which is hidden now shall be plainly revealed, and that which has been done in darkness shall be proclaimed upon the housetop. The whole life-story shall be known at a glance.

The judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened: not literal books I need hardly say, yet a register that is

indestructible. There is a faculty in man which becomes the book of account; the soul is its own unfailing register. What a marvellous power is that of memory! It holds the past in its storehouses, and connects Divine things by subtle links of association. Years may roll away, and this event or that may seem to have passed out of its keeping, when the glance of a face, the sight of a tree, or the tones of a voice may suddenly recall the whole thing to the mind. However far a man goes in the journey of life, he never goes far enough for the past to die out of him. Nay, it seems as if a long interval only displayed all the more the power of memory's grasp. The old man, the farther he leaves the days of his childhood and his youth, the more clearly can he recall them. The things of yesterday have already grown shadowy, but the events of half a century ago are distinctly present to the mind. "Of this at least I feel assured, that there is no such thing as ultimate *forgetting*; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind. Accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil. But alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever; just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, whereas, in fact, we all know that it is the light which is drawn over them as a veil, and that they are waiting to be revealed whenever the obscuring daylight itself shall have withdrawn." *

* De Quincey's "Confessions," p. 261. This writer, in whose pages I first met with Coleridge's idea that the human soul itself "perchance is the dread book of judgment, in the mysterious hieroglyphics of which every idle word is recorded," gives a remarkable case in illustration of the power of the memory not only to reproduce the past, but to reproduce it all at once. The case is that of a lady, a near relative of his own, and he had the experience from her own lips. "Playing by the side of a solitary brook, she fell into one of its deepest pools. Eventually, but after what lapse of time nobody ever knew, she was saved from death by a farmer, who riding in some distant lane had seen her rise to the surface, but not until she had descended within the abyss of death, and looked into its secrets, as far, perhaps, as ever human eye *can* have looked that had permission to return. At a certain stage of this descent, a blow seemed to strike her, phosphoric radiance sprang forth from her eyeballs, and immediately a mighty theatre expanded within her brain. In a

There, in the soul, is the book of account; and on the great day it shall be opened, and the past shall all stand forth for judgment. An accident, a fever can open its pages even now; but another power shall open it then, when the great white throne is uplifted. The unveiling of God's presence has been a revelation of man to himself many a time and oft. When Isaiah beheld the Lord high and lifted up, His train filling the temple, his own dark and sinful past rose up before him amid the rushings of celestial light, and he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Again, in later times, when the Lord turned and *looked* on Peter, the awful sin of his denial rose up before him, and he went out and wept bitterly. So shall memory turn over its pages when the Judge of quick and dead shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The very sight of His face shall open the books of account. Then shall all the past rise up before us and before Him, and then and there shall sentence be declared—

"Opened book! all eyes engages,
Bearing record of all ages
Blazoned on its burning pages.

Whence the Judge strict doom is sealing,
Every hidden thought revealing,
None escaping, none appealing.

moment, in the twinkling of an eye, every act, every design of her past life lived again, arraying themselves not as a succession but as parts of a co-existence. Such a light fell upon the whole path of her life, backwards into the shades of infancy, as the light perhaps which wrapt the destined apostle on his road to Damascus. The true point of astonishment is not the *simultaneity* of arrangement under which the past events of life, though in fact successive, had formed their dread line of revelation. This was but a secondary phenomenon; the deeper lay in the resurrection itself, and the possibility of resurrection for what had so long slept in the dust. A pall, deep as oblivion, had been thrown by life over every trace of these experiences; and yet suddenly, at a silent command, at the signal of a blazing rocket sent up from the brain, the pall draws up, and the whole depths of the theatre are exposed. Here was the greater mystery. Now this mystery is liable to no doubt; for it is repeated, and ten thousand times repeated, by opium, for those who are its martyrs."

Who that now His coming feareth,
Who shall stand when He appeareth,
When the righteous scarce He clearth?"

Need I utter one word more to press home on your hearts the solemnities of that great day? We shall not be spectators merely of its mighty events. We who are here now shall all be there, not to look on, but to receive judgment, and to enter upon our final destiny. The day hastens to its close, and night gathers round it the curtains of darkness, and then again the morning cometh. But day and night, as they succeed each other, bear us all on to the great tribunal, the account to render there. Even if there were no day of judgment coming, one would think that the bare idea of such a day would be as a trumpet-blast in the soul. But I am not now speaking of that which *may* be, but of that which *will* be. I am not now trying to rouse you to thought by a fancy, but by a fact. Round about me here there may be those who are casting off fear. To them the voice of temptation comes, pleading for indulgence; and only too readily they listen and follow on. The sweet enticements of iniquity are multiplying sorrowful memories. The dark things are done in secret—are done in spite of better resolutions and the earnest pleadings of conscience. Evil deeds are done, and because no angel-presence rends the heavens and comes down—no voice of warning breaks the silence of eternity—the sinner grows bold in sin. Blind eyes do not see that the thing done is registered on the doer. The world enthralls thee, and Satan tempts thee, and lust impels thee, and thy heart inclines thee; but know thou that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on His left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into

everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

That day of decision will be the day of the Lord Jesus. Blessed then will they be whose one purpose in life has been to win Christ, and to be found in Him. With meekness, and yet with boldness, shall they come before their Lord, and He will welcome His own. Their one plea will be His love and sacrifice, and that plea shall be all-prevailing. Holy George Herbert put their case as they would have it, when thus he put his own :

"Almighty Judge, how shall poor wretches brook
Thy dreadful look,
Able a heart of iron to appal,
When Thou shalt call
For every man's peculiar book?

What others mean to do I know not well;
Yet I hear tell
That some will turn Thee to some leaves therein,
So void of sin
That they in merit shall excel.

But I resolve, when Thou shalt call for mine,
That to decline,
And thrust a testament into Thy hand!
Let *that* be scanned:
There Thou shalt find my faults are Thine."

XIII.

JERUSALEM THE GOLDEN.

REVELATION xxi.

THROUGH storm and conflict we have reached the haven of peace at last. The judgment has been set, and is over. Each man's destiny has been declared. The vast multitude have parted company before the great white throne, and gone their several ways. The old world has reached its end; and now before us there rise in vision the new heaven and the new earth. We thus enter upon the *Fifth and last Part* of the book of Revelation—that which sets before us the eternal state of the righteous after resurrection and judgment.

When man fell, the curse lighted upon his habitation as well as upon himself. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. In nature, as in man, we have "everywhere the same appearance of something that beclouds and darkens, everywhere the same traces of aberration from appointed ends, the same hints of perverted tendencies, the same tokens of frustration and decay." The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope. Creation fell with man its lord, and with him it shall rise again. Its earnest expectation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. And it shall not wait in vain. Christ will undo to the uttermost the deadly work of sin. God has "made known to us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, in regard of the dispensation of the fulness of times, to sum up again (for Himself) all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth,—even in Him, in whom we were also chosen for His inheritance" (Eph. i. 9-11).

Thus shall Divine power prepare the final home of Christ's redeemed ones. We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. We are not told much more; but the few hints that are given are bright with glory. It may be that a change shall pass upon the earth analogous to that which shall pass upon man at the resurrection. It seems an unlikely thing that a spiritual body, with all its marvellous power and glory, should rise up out of the natural body, which seems to pass to corruption almost before it can be buried out of sight. Yet He who knows what wondrous powers He has implanted in these mortal bodies has plainly declared that so it shall be. Except the body die, it cannot live its noblest life. By the very process of corruption which seems to be its ruin, there is disengaged the germ of a glorious nature, which is only awaiting the sound of the archangel's trumpet to receive its full development. May it not be with the earth as with man? May it not be that that which seems to be its overthrow, by fire, shall in truth be the process by which it passes from corruption to glory? The earth, as it is now, is fitted to man's bodily needs and nature, as he is now; and the earth, as it shall be, shall be fitted to man as he shall be. And as man in his spiritual body shall excel man in his natural body, so shall the new world, in its spiritual glory, excel the earth as we have it now, fair as it is. What that new world will be, I dare not undertake to say. We may speculate, but we must wait to know. Yet we can hardly refrain from the belief that the present types of power, and beauty, and strength, and glory we see around us, shall appear in more exalted and perfect form. That undefinable thing which we call expression, and which constitutes the beauty of nature as it constitutes the charm of the face of man, is not a material thing, however it may play round and light up that which is material. I believe that it shall re-appear in a brighter world, when the material has vanished away. Everything beautiful and good shall be found again in our new home; and there it shall have lost every trace of imperfection and decay. The old world was stricken with sin, and this dark heritage filled it with tears and sorrow, with bloodshed and death. There was always an under-tone of sadness and a

wail of distress to be heard by those who would stop and listen. But in the new heavens and the new earth shall dwell righteousness; and when we are told that, our minds may be set at rest about everything else. With sin, all that sin begets shall pass away for ever.

John describes for us the glory of that new spiritual world. As he stood gazing with holy joy upon the new home prepared for the righteous, in the place of vision he hears a mighty voice, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they themselves shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them as their God." The Lord was their joy here, and He shall be their gladness there. In no passing way shall the light of His countenance fall upon them; but His delights shall be with the sons of men, and He shall dwell among them. We cannot tell all the glory there will be in that new creation; but we can speak confidently of some things that will not be there. *Tears* shall be wiped away for ever; no more shall they fall at the disappointments and bereavements of life, or at the sense of sin or the sight of iniquity: a Divine hand shall wipe them, and shall wipe them away. There shall be no more *pain*: wearing toil and weariness, wasting disease and feebleness shall be at an end for ever. Here the mind has its pain as well as the body, its anxieties, its carking cares; but there, there shall be no more *sorrow*. Neither shall *death* come in again and mar the scene; never again shall it waste the home, desolate the heart, or bring to the ground the purposes of man. The former things are passed away. Lest a hope so bright should be deemed delusive, the apostle heard Him that sat on the throne say, "Behold I make all things new." And, to strengthen the poor, wavering faith of men whose experience of life had bitterly taught them not to expect too much, "He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done," for the future is as the present with the Eternal. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that conquereth shall inherit these things; and I will be to him God, and he himself shall be to me a son. But for those who are cowardly, and unfaithful, and defiled

with abominations, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and for all the false, their share is in the lake which is kindled with fire and brimstone; which thing is the second death." The faithful shall be crowned; but those who have been cowardly in the face of the enemy, those who have had no faith, surrounded with terrible companionships of evil, shall be cast out. He that hath an ear, let him hear!

After these solemn declarations John is called to behold a wondrous sight. He has seen the land of inheritance, he must now look at the sublime symbol of the inhabitants themselves. "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." In the spirit the apostle was borne away to the top of a mountain great and high, and there opened to his view—

"Glory, beyond all glory ever seen
By waking sense or by the dreaming soul!
The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
Was of a mighty city—boldly say
A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth,
Far sinking into splendour—without end!
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes, and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright,
In avenues disposed; there towers begirt
With battlements that on their restless fronts
Bore stars—illumination of all gems!
Oh, 'twas an unimaginable sight!"

It came down from God out of heaven—a Divine conception. The plan of no earthly architect, it was wrought in silence, and appeared to the apostle's vision in its magnificent completeness, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King. It was resplendent with the Divine glory, its light like that which flashes from precious stones, clear as crystal. For its defence there was a mighty wall of jasper, which had twelve gate-towers; three of these were towards the sun-rising, three towards the north wind, three towards the south wind,

and three towards the sun-setting. At each gate-tower there was an angel-sentinel keeping watch and ward, and over the gate a shield, with the name of one of the tribes of Israel engraved thereon. This mighty wall of defence had twelve massive foundation stones, and upon each was inscribed the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. These foundation stones were themselves most precious, like those which flashed from the breastplate of the high-priest. The city stretched hundreds of miles in length and breadth, and rose towards heaven as high as it spread wide on the earth. Terrace over terrace, it spread upwards in glory, till the length and the breadth and the height of it were equal. The street of this gorgeous city was gold, pure as transparent glass. And this was the holy city, New Jerusalem, a city without a peer in grandeur or extent. The Hebrew of the old time had a patriotic pride in the city of his fathers, and with exultation would bid the nations "walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following." But here is a city, before which the earthly Jerusalem sinks into insignificance. The city of the great king, which David built, was, after all, but a poor type of the grander city which God is building,—the Jerusalem which is from above.

Stripped of its symbolic description, what is that city, and what is the Divine thought which it embodies? It will not escape you that it is at once spoken of as the holy city, and as the bride, the Lamb's wife. This blending of figures is not new to us, and here it helps us. In carrying out the idea of a city, there is necessitated the idea of its inhabitants walking in the light of it. But, without pressing this part of the figure, we are to think of all faithful, redeemed souls, not as dwelling in that city, but as themselves composing it. The New Jerusalem is also the bride, the Lamb's wife; and the bride is the Church which the Saviour has redeemed with His own blood, and which, one day, He will present to Himself in perfect purity. We thus come upon a thought far grander than that of a beautiful city where the saints shall have their habitation.

Let us, with deep reverence of heart, go back a step or

two. Just think for a moment how God has been expressing Himself in His works through all the past. The purpose of creation does not respect the creature alone, or even primarily. All things were created by the Lord, and for Him. In the depths of the infinite nature alone can be found the explanation of creation's mystery. God is under no necessity to express Himself in His works, but He delights to do this. One of the keenest pleasures of life is to find something growing under your hand, and in this respect I conceive man is the image of God. The Creator did not make this world, and clothe it with beauty, for our sakes alone. Age after age He was working in the heart of tropical forests: the rich vegetation, the luscious fruits, the gay beauty of the flowers, the gorgeous plumage of the birds, the teeming wealth of life in every form,—all were put forth there for centuries while human footstep never came near, and human eye ne'er looked on. You think of all this, and can only say that in these thousand forms of richest beauty and life it was a pleasure to the infinite Mind to display and disport itself. And my pleasure in God's works—one of the purest pleasures given to man in this world—arises from the fact that there my mind meets with and touches His mind; just as my pleasure in a picture arises, not from the mere colour or canvas, but from the mind of the painter there embodied, and with which mine comes into contact.

In creation, then, God has given us an expression of Himself. The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Very grandly in the Book of Psalms is this idea repeated in every form. With the psalmist, nature is not God, but God is in and through nature displaying Himself. It is His voice in the wind and storm that bends the trees; it is His strength that is seen in the mountains; it is His love of beauty that is seen in every tangled dell, and leafy wood, and rippling stream.

But not in the mountains, forests, and valleys of earth, or in the firmament of the heavens alone, will the Infinite express His nature. There has been a grander utterance than that by the coming of Him who is the Word of God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. As no mere after-thought, or expedient to

meet an unforeseen evil, but as a purpose from everlasting, God was manifest in the flesh. The Lord who redeemed us is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Not in the heart of time, but in the depths of eternity, is to be found the explanation of redemption. Long ere the morning stars sang together, or the sons of God shouted for joy at creation's birth, the great Father prepared to give such an expression of Himself as had never yet been given. And, in the fulness of time, the mystery that had been hid from ages and generations was made known,—the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

But stupendous as was this event in itself, it is not done with yet. It has only begun to work out its issues. It is a central fact, around which others are to cluster and form one glorious unity. We are not to think of Christ alone, or of the Church alone, but of Christ and the Church together. It is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. He is the Head, "from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." He, the God-man, is the Divine pattern after which the Father works in the restoration of sinful man. We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. Nothing less will satisfy His love, nothing less will satisfy our aspirations. Each man, according to the power of his nature, shall reflect some aspect of the glory of Christ's nature. Each believing soul, according to the capacities of its being, shall be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. But no one human soul can ever fully represent the Son of God. Every aspect of holy human nature is seen in Him, and He is truly in the grandeur of His nature "all mankind's epitome." There are passages of Scripture that indicate that a perfect Church will be a perfect reflection of the Lord Jesus. For the preparation of such a Church all helps and means of grace were provided. He, our Head, when He ascended up on high, gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto their work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we

all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* The whole Church was to form one perfect man; the Church as a whole was to grow to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Christ is the express image of the Father; and the Church, when complete at last, shall be together a perfect reflection of its Lord and Head.

This is a grand conception, not to be lightly taken up or laid aside. That the human race is tending to one living unity is a thought that has often been put forth. There are dim feelings after it on every side. All the experiences of life show us that it is not good for man to be alone, show indeed that he cannot be alone. However proud and self-sufficient he may be, he is joined by links to the community around him, which he cannot sever. In the family there is a unity made up of several parts. The strength of the father, the tenderness of the mother, the varied characters of brothers and sisters, all go up to make a whole which would be incomplete with fewer parts. There is a unity in the city again, which there is not in the family; and there is a unity in the state and nation there is not in the single city. But the grandest conception of all is that Christ will gather into one all God's children from remotest ages and lands. The whole multitude of the redeemed shall form but one community at last. Our fathers caught this idea from their Bibles, and spoke of the elect number of the saved. The redeemed are spoken of under various figures to show their completeness and their oneness; they are the many branches of the one vine, the many members of the one body; together they make up the bride, the Lamb's wife. And here, in the book of Revelation, John sees that Church under the symbol of a stately city. Some parts are for strength, and some for beauty. All are of precious materials. But wall, and tower, and spire, foundations, gates, and palaces are very varied in structure and appearance. Every part is needful for the completeness of the whole, and it forms one grand whole, each stone lending strength and beauty to the rest. There is here presented to us then a vivid representation of the vastness, the glory, the many-sidedness of the Church of the re-

deemed at last. It shall be multiform, yet one—a perfect man, and that perfect man of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Taken together, the Church will be a complete reflection of the perfect human nature of its Lord. There will be the expression in living form of the wisdom, purity, and glory of God, such as the universe had never seen before. We see Him faintly in the visible glory of this outer world, but not as He will be seen reflected by a multitude which no man can number of conscious, intelligent, voluntary, and redeemed souls. They were made to be in His image, and to that image they are restored. Then, as in ransomed humanity He is reflected in all His glory, the Saviour shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

As I think of this grand unity which shall be seen at last, I come to understand why we are so different one from another, and why we go through such different experiences in the discipline of life. Man gets unity in uniformity; God secures unity in variety. The unity that He seeks is unity produced by life, and life cannot be bound down to fixedness of shape. While precisely alike in the elements of their life and the principle of their growth, no two trees of the forest are precisely alike in the form of bough and branch and twig. Life luxuriates in freedom, and disports itself in endless variety of form. So it is in the kingdom of Christ. While holding to the Head, how different are the members of His body! They differ in structure of mind, in grace of character, in opinion and modes of worship. One man's soul is untouched by an appeal which rouses another to the very depths of his being. One man would be grievously fettered by modes of worship that seem to his brother absolutely essential to the vigour of his life. We have one man all gentleness, and his fellow-Christian all firmness and strength. "We see, in those around us, that each one has some characteristic feature; in the mind of one we see a deep wisdom, of another a saintly meekness, of another an angelic contemplation, of another a burning charity,—each one being a law, a pattern to himself. We see, too, that this characteristic feature is ever coming out into a fuller shape, drawing towards its one perfect idea. So may we believe that in the kingdom of the resurrection all the gifts of God, all

graces of the heart, and all endowments of the sanctified reason shall then be made perfect; without doubt, all that constitutes the mysterious individuality of each several man, all the inscrutable features by which his spiritual being is distinguished, without being opposed to or divided from the spirits of other men, shall be perpetuated hereafter; and then shall all differences be harmonized in the perfection of bliss, as all hues are blended in the unity of light.”*

And not only does that unity demand variety of character among those living in the same generation, but it will also embrace men from widely sundered generations, subjected to different training in the course of providence. Abraham, dwelling in his tent amidst the calmness of that far-off eastern life, must present different aspects of character from the godly man trained in the midst of these busy nineteenth-century days. Faithful souls, to whom it was given to follow Christ in times of peace, can scarcely estimate aright the man who was formed in a time of transition and upheaval. George Herbert, singing sweetly in his west-country parsonage, could know little of the conflict, fierce and terrible, through which the spirit of a Luther was made like its Lord. There have been times of reaction, when the work of faithful men has been to throw down the human inventions that would obstruct the path to the fountain of life,—times of witness-bearing, when the duty of sealing her testimony with her blood has been laid on the Church,—and times of evangelistic work and aggressive warfare, when she had to plant the standard of her Lord on the high places of the field. Each of these different periods has developed different elements of character. But we can see the meaning of it all when we think of these thus wide apart brought together at last, and “forming a vast, world-wide, heaven-high image and reproduction of Christ’s person and character, redeemed out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, by the blood of the Lamb.”

Thus also this glorious vision of the holy city throws light on the varied experiences and seeming inequalities of human life. How often have we said that there appears to be a kind of predestination in the diversified lot of those

* Manning.

around us. Some seem to have a smooth and easy path, free from the heavier sorrows of their neighbours. They have neither had overjoying strokes of good fortune, nor overwhelming tempests of calamity. While there, at the very same table of the Lord, is a Christian brother who has gone through one sharp trial after another, has been smitten in his tenderest place and wounded in his deepest affections. Some men live all their life under the same set of influences, in the same town, and, for the most part, in the same relations with the same neighbours. Others, again, are tossed about in the world, and are called to win their bread in places far asunder. There are those who begin life in straits and hardships, and leave it at last surrounded by affluence and comfort; while some at their side, starting in wealth and ease, come down to feel the bitter pangs of that poverty which is all the keener to them because of its strangeness. One man scarcely ever knows what it is to feel out of health, while his neighbour scarcely ever knows what it is to feel well. One man's life is passed amid stirring activities, while another passes years of what should have been the prime of his manhood upon the bed of helplessness. How very different is God's providential dealing, even with His own people! But when we come to see that He is fitting them all for their various places in that city of gold, flashing with jasper light, we can trace a purpose of wisdom running through all this diversity. The sort of training and discipline that would fit one man for his place in that living city would scarcely touch or influence another. Therefore, with a wisdom and love which we shall appreciate better by-and-by when we see the glorious result of it all, He appoints our several places and diversifies our discipline with our lot. The great Architect with unerring skill is fitting all for their true places. With "afflictions sorted," with instrument and circumstance as varied as the purpose they are meant to serve, He is carrying on His work, and "through the ages one increasing purpose runs." There is wonderful help, it seems to me, in these thoughts. Meekly, and even joyfully, can I bend to His will when I see that all things work together for good, that all painful experiences are meant to fit me the more for reflecting His glory

who redeemed me. I am more than submissive when I find that He is seeking to give me elements of character which others do not possess in precisely the same form, so that through me there shall be nothing lacking to the full reflection of the grace and beauty of my loving Lord.

The whole universe is waiting until the stately structure is complete. Stone by stone the city of God is rising, and, at the time fixed in the eternal counsels, the last stone shall be brought with shoutings of Grace! grace! unto it! Then shall there be a manifestation of the glory, the wisdom, and the power of the Lord, such as has never been seen before. It shall be at once the admiration and instruction of the whole creation of God. Then unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places shall be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God. Nor shall these angels of light, the church of the first-born, alone look on this wondrous sight. The process of creation may fill all the future, as it has filled all the past. Other beings in other worlds may come forth to gaze on the glory of the Lord, as it is reflected from the Church thus redeemed and perfected through the blood of Christ. "For God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He hath loved us, (even when we were dead in sins,) hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" and for this sublime purpose, "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus." Far down the stream, not of time only but of eternity, shall new creatures of God gaze upon the blood-bought Church. And they shall see it, not torn and shattered, but perfect in its unity, and complete—a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. They shall see it as the city of the great King; its walls of jasper, its streets of gold, and its gates of pearl, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. As with holy rapture they gaze on each palace and citadel, on each tower and spire, bathed in the light of the Sun of righteousness, they shall take up the cry, first uttered long ages before,—“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

“ Strive, man, to win that glory ;
Toil, man, to gain that light ;
Send hope before to grasp it,
Till hope be lost in sight ;
When He whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known,
And they that know and see Him
Shall have Him for their own.
Then all the halls of Syon
For aye shall be complete,
And in the land of beauty
All things of beauty meet.
O mine, my golden Syon !
O lovelier far than gold !
With laurel-girt battalions,
And safe victorious fold :
Oh, none can tell thy bulwarks,
How gloriously they rise ;
Oh, none can tell thy capitals,
Of beautiful device ;
Thy loveliness oppresses
All human thought and heart ;
And none, O peace, O Syon,
Can sing thee as thou art !
Jerusalem Exultant,
On that securest shore,
I hope thee, wish thee, sing thee,
And love thee evermore.”

O that we all may be living stones in that fair city of God. Into it shall come the glory and honour of the nations. Thither will all noblest gifts and graces, all purest light and life, all loftiest glory of humanity be gathered at last. In very truth it will be Jerusalem the Golden—the realm and home of life.

XIV.

THE PARTING WORDS.

REVELATION xxii.

THE stately city of God, the New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven, was presented in vision to the joyful gaze of the apostle, as we have seen already. It was the symbol of the wide comprehensiveness, the spiritual grandeur, and the complete unity of the Church of the redeemed. The thought was not new in Scripture, but had never been given with such fulness of beauty before as in the vision of John. We had read of believers as living stones, built up a spiritual house. Elsewhere had we found the most precious materials of earth used to set forth the most exalted and enduring elements of character. The Christian preacher is charged to build upon Christ, the foundation, only such materials as will stand the testing fires of eternity. The spiritual elements of the Church are as gold, silver, and precious stones, contrasted with wood, hay, and stubble. Costly jewels, that glow with subtle light, burning without fire, and yet with a brilliancy that is ever living and unchanged, are chosen to represent the imperishable glories of Christian character. And now the company of sanctified men, resting for life in the Lord Jesus Christ, is compared to a glorious city of light, encompassed by walls built upon imperishable foundations, and flashing forth with a glory that never grows dim.

As the apostle gazed upon the city, he saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. The helps by the way will be no longer needed, for the Divine Presence will be felt without a veil between. We shall no longer direct our prayers to an unseen Lord, in the exercise of faith. We shall see Him

face to face. The contact of spirit with spirit will be direct and immediate. God's plan is that we should steadily advance from and through the material to the spiritual. First, there was the one temple on the hill of Zion. Then there appeared that Saviour, whose coming broke down the special sacredness, even of Jerusalem, with the words, "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Throughout the wide world should these temples for worship be erected. Wherever they make their habitation, men should mark off the sacred enclosure where they and their children might worship the Father of their spirits. And these places should be held sacred, not as by contrast with their own homes. The Christian temple is separated from the rest of the city, to show what the rest of the city is intended to be—all consecrated to the Lord. The sanctuary does its work best when it helps men to make all places and all duties sacred. There is to be no gulf fixed between the house of God and the world outside; but life-giving streams, flowing forth until the life outside shall rise to the level of the life within. Then, when "Holiness to the Lord" is written everywhere, the temple is needless, for every place is hallowed ground; therefore in that golden city John saw no temple: the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. The redeemed will be so encompassed by the Divine Presence, that God Himself will be, as it were, the shrine in which man shall then adore Him. God Himself is the temple of the city. And as He is its temple, so is He its light. All earthly channels of blessing may be dispensed with. "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." In high and holy fellowship the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it. There shall be perfect security from every foe without, and perfect freedom for every dweller within. By day the gates shall not be shut at all, and night there shall not be. There is no fear of evil, and tributes of glory shall always be coming in. They shall bring the glory and

honour of the nations into it. All that is noble and good shall be free of the city ; all that is evil shall be under an everlasting ban. There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, nor he that maketh an abomination and a lie, but only they who have been written in the Lamb's book of life.

So stood in stateliness and grandeur, in perfect security and unfading blessedness, the city of the great King as John beheld it in vision. There it rose "in royalty of pile and tower, brightening beneath an unsetting day." But glorious as was this sight, it was not all. The vision widens, and embraces other aspects of blessedness. The beauty of a paradise fairer than that of Eden is joined to the splendour of a city more magnificent than Jerusalem. "From beneath the throne of God and of the Lamb, there poured forth a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal." And on the banks of this stream there is not merely, as in the first paradise, one tree of life ; but it is so multiplied that it stands on either side along the river, so fruitful that it bears every month the whole year round, and it is fitted, at the same time, for the needs of every man, for it bears twelve manner of fruits. Its leaves as well as its fruit have the virtue of immortality, and are for the healing of the nations. This tree of life is no longer guarded by the flaming sword, turning every way ; it is free to every man ; it is in the most open place that can be found, in the midst of the street ; there is no enclosure, no restriction, but free and unfettered use and enjoyment.

These two symbols, of the river, and tree of life, have a recognised place in the book of God, and are of deep significance. Through the first Eden a river flowed, and in the midst stood the tree of life. So shall it be with the second ; and we are not without help to the meaning both of the river and the tree. The river symbolises the Divine Spirit, the very life of God that flows through the channel of faith into man's soul. Our Lord Himself taught us this. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters." These are Christ's own words, and the

apostle John, in the next verse, explains them thus: "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." In Ezekiel's vision there appeared a stream of water, flowing forth from under the threshold of the temple, and it rose and rose from the ankles to the knees, from the knees to the loins, and from the loins till the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. "And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live." So shall it be with paradise regained. The redeemed of the Lord shall receive of the Spirit without measure. Like a river flowing forth in rich abundance and crystal purity, shall the very life of God enter the spirits of the saved, and everything shall live where that comes; as Bunyan says of this river: "This is soul life, life against sin, life from sin; life against the curse, life from the curse; life beyond hell, beyond desert, beyond thought, beyond desires; life that is pleasing, life that is profitable, life everlasting."

But there is a tree of life as well as a river. In the garden of Eden this was found a literal fact. It seems to me they are right who hold that the fruit of that tree conferred the blessing of deathlessness on the body of man. It had power to transform the earthly nature into the spiritual. An earthly body cannot be essentially immortal. But God gave a power to the fruit of the tree of life, whereby the bodily tabernacle of the spirit would have been gradually developed into a spiritual tabernacle, like that we shall have at the resurrection. Man would have passed into the glorified state without tasting death. There is great probability that the lives of the patriarchs were prolonged as they were by the transmitted influence of the tree of life, of which man had partaken before he was banished from the bowers of Eden. After the first race of men, who lived their hundreds of years, human life gradually became shorter, until the power of the tree of life had spent itself, and the days of our years settled down to the average of threescore years and ten. In mercy as well as in wrath, "The Lord God sent man forth from the garden of Eden, lest he put forth his hand and take also of

the tree of life, and eat and live for ever." For the outward body is but the expression of the inward nature ; and for that body to become immortal, while the spirit is corrupt and sin-stricken, would be a curse rather than a blessing. Therefore now, through the gates of death the body must pass, and by resurrection attain to immortality. So by one stupendous act of Divine power, instead of by a process of gradual development, shall the natural body pass into the spiritual body. But, after the resurrection, man shall eat of the tree of life again, and it shall be for his body immortal sustenance, even as the water of life shall be to his spirit unfailing refreshment : to him that overcometh will be given to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in, through the gates, into the city.

Into the first paradise there entered the curse, and blighted all human life. It fell upon the ground, which then brought forth briers and thorns freely, and wholesome fruits only at the price of toilsome labour. It fell upon man himself, and made him liable to disease and pain, to tears and disappointment. Everywhere there are traces of sorrow, frustration, decay, and death, because everywhere the curse has been working. But there shall be no more curse in that new world of righteousness. There shall be no more curse, for there shall be no more sin. All shall be loyal obedience to the one holy will. The emblems of Divine sovereignty and rule are there ; the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall be sons as well as servants, and shall see His face, walking all the day in the light of His countenance. It shall no longer be matter of doubt, either to themselves or others, whether they are the Lord's children or not. The sign shall be plain and unmistakable. His name shall be in their foreheads. Gloom and darkness shall be known no more, ignorance and danger shall vanish away ; there shall be no night there. The helps by the way, the dim lights of time, shall no more be needed than the light of the stars at noonday. In the splendour and effulgence of the Divine glory shall they walk,—they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God

giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever. Thus at length shall perfect blessing be what it has never been through long centuries—the portion of the sons of men. Holy loyalty shall dwell safely and breathe its native air. “Only the faultless stand before the throne! The holy are renewed and confirmed in indefectible purity! They cannot sin! They adorn those heavens, shining as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever! They enrich that earth, rising as pillars on which is written the name of God, and the name of the city of their God, and added to all is inscribed by the Saviour, His ‘new name.’ Happiness, in all thy forms, thou art there! Love, in all thy ties, thou art there! Devotion, in all thine ardours, thou art there! Melody, in all thy chords, thou art there! But ye follow in the train of that which is greater than you all. Righteousness shall go before you, and shall set you in the way of its steps! Righteousness has there built its dwelling-place, and throws open the portals for all that is kindred to it! Like Him, in whom it only perfectly and necessarily exists, it shall inhabit eternity!”

And now, having shown us the purpose of God in the world’s redemption, the course of the incarnation, obedience, suffering, and death of the Son of God,—the onward path of the Church, through conflict to glory,—the voice of Revelation is about to be hushed into silence, for all that needed to be told now has been told. But ere the voice dies away, three times are declared to us the Divine origin, the absolute certainty, and the speedy accomplishment, of the predictions of this book.

First, the angel who has been the apostle’s guide through the wonders of vision, says, “These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His messenger to show unto His servants the things which must shortly be done.” Speaking in the name of his Lord, he adds, “Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Scripture hath many parts, but only one great source of inspiration. He who gives to His messenger this closing part is the Lord God of the holy prophets, by whose Spirit they were moved and spake. Like all that went before, the declara-

tions and visions of this book are stamped with Divine authority. We are told who says it, as well as what He says. The matter is urgent, for the beginning of the fulfilment is near. The clouds are gathering over Jerusalem. In its overthrow, the Lord's appearance is at hand. By His messenger He cries, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed are they who watch and stand strong; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

Having affirmed the Divine origin of his visions, the apostle gives us his solemn assurance that by him they were beheld. On matters of such moment there must be no uncertainty; and that there may not be, here is the sign-manual of the witness: "And I John saw these things and heard them. They are not the mere fancies of a heated brain, but solemn verities, clothed in Divinely chosen symbols, which to me were shown. They are not my opinions, but Divine revelations." When the apostle speaks of Christ, he is bent on making it plain that he is setting forth facts and not speculations: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life: that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." In like manner, also, when speaking of the conflicts and victories of Christ's Church, he gives us the testimony of an honest and competent witness: "I John saw these things and heard them."

But the revelations, so glorious and momentous, were almost more than flesh and blood could endure. Again, as before, he who heard and saw was overwhelmed, and was in danger of falling from the pinnacle of vision into the depths of sin. "And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things." But that homage which Jesus accepted from an apostle as His lawful right, an angel dare not receive. Again, as before, and as if the sinful tendency to creature-worship in the Church must have frequent warning, the angel cried at once, "See thou do it not; I am but a fellow-servant of thee and of thy brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the sayings of this book: to God pay thy worship." When Daniel had beheld the

vision of Israel's future, he is charged to "shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end," for the end is not yet. On the other hand, the angel said to the apostle, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand,—the season of fulfilment is near. And the revelation of the Divine mind and will is drawing to a close. All that is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,—all this has been given. Sublime truths have been declared, stirring motives have been plied; if a man can and does resist all the appeals that have been made already, he can resist anything. The grave might give up the dead to go forth among the living, and reveal the secrets of doom or the ravishing joys of glory; but all that would soon become common-place, and cease to startle. If they hear not Moses and the prophets,—if they disregard Christ and His apostles,—neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. If a man will resist the light, and cleave to sin, in spite of warning and entreaty, it must be so. God has sent His message, but He will not secure its acceptance by violence. Men may make either a wise or a fatal use of their liberty; but God will give no further revelation of His will till the day of account. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." The Lord goes away for awhile, saying unto His servants, "Occupy till I come." But here He says, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give back to every man according as His work shall be."

Thus the angel's message is closed, and Christ Himself stands forth, declaring, as at the opening of the book, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Having declared His royal right to judge, He speaks of the separation that will follow upon judgment, and the diverse lot that separation will bring. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in openly and by the lawful way, through the gate-towers into the city. Blessed are they in actual condition—blessed also by solemn contrast.

For outside the heavenly city, in outer darkness, are those who have no part or memorial in Jerusalem: without are dogs, the rapacious and unclean; and sorcerers, those who have wickedly practised on the credulity of mankind; and whoremongers, the licentious and impure; and murderers, any who have manifested or cherished the spirit of hatred against those around them; and idolaters who have in any form bent to the creature rather than to the Creator, who is over all, God blessed for ever; and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, the false, unreal, and empty,—these, all these shall be gathered, a ghastly multitude, without the city. This solemn warning given, the Lord endorses the testimony of His servant,—I, Jesus, have sent mine angel, or my messenger, to testify unto you these things in the Church—I, who am the strength and flower of Jesse's rod, the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star of an unsetting day of glory.

And now that which the angel had declared, and the Lord confirmed, the Church repeats. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! And let him that heareth say, Come! And let him that thirsteth come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Evermore the Spirit stirring in the Church's heart leads her to pray that Christ would come to her, and also that perishing men around may come to Him. The two things run together. He comes to the Church, as thirsty, perishing souls come to Him. The very longing for her Lord leads her to long for them that shall be to Him as the travail of His soul. He that hears for himself and lives, must pass on the watchword of hope, and cry, Come! Judgment has been declared against sin, but there is the Divine compassion for the sinner. God, our Saviour, will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

When Israel had reached the end of their long wilderness wandering, and were on the verge of Canaan, Moses first reviewed the past dealings of the Lord with them, and then solemnly charged them, when they entered their new home, to keep, in all their simplicity and integrity, the statutes and judgments of God. Said he, "Ye shall not

add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." Thus solemnly also, ere this book is closed, are men charged that they may neither add to nor diminish the utterance of the Divine purpose: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Warning and impressive check have we here, on the one hand, against the presumption that would overlay the commandments of God by the traditions of men; and on the other, against that indolent indifference which takes away from the book of the prophecy by neglect. God's truth is the one bulwark against error, the one weapon that will be victorious in the war against wrong; therefore with holy jealousy must it be guarded from loss or harm. Every utterance of the Divine Spirit is to be to the faithful as thousands of gold and silver. God's truth is the sanctifying power in the Church; and not even an angel from heaven may be permitted to make an addition of his own, or to preach another Gospel. As the chemist permits no tampering with the sensitive balance which is his testing power, neither may we suffer any created being to bring us new revelations, or to rob us of those which are given in that law and testimony which tries all things, and to the final tests of which nothing but truth will conform.

The parting words are growing few. He who testifieth these things, the Lord Jesus Himself, saith to His Church, Surely I come quickly; and that Church, from her heart, replies, Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus. His coming in every form is the object of hope and the crown of desire. A longing Church, a suffering world, watch for the morning—Even so come, Lord Jesus.

And now, last of all, softly as the dew of heaven, falls the benediction of the disciple whom Jesus loved, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." This is the closing utterance, and it gathers up all that has

been said before. He, who is our Lord, as Sovereign over life; who is Jesus, as the Son of man, here living and dying to put away sin; who is Christ, as the anointed of the Father; He is the source of all grace and blessing to men. The apostle says not, My blessing be with you, but the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, I may say, with another apostle, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich." Herein is the meaning of the benediction unfolded—the love displayed to dying men, by the incarnation, the suffering, the wondrous sacrifice and death of the world's Saviour, is the measure of the blessing, for which still we may look. Far up in the past you may sound the depths of that stream of life which is flowing round you now. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,—the grace that first contrived the way of deliverance, and that made the needful sacrifice for its accomplishment,—the grace that has been the very life and strength of God's Church, its shield and defence in the hour of storm, its renewal in the day of decline,—the grace that has been life to the dead, joy to the mourner, strength to the weak, and hope to the down-cast:—may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,—with *you* who are now in the midst of the generations, bearing the responsibility of the living, who have present trials to endure, present temptations to face, present duties to discharge,—with you *all*:—with the aged, that as the shadows of life's evening grow thicker, the lights on the farther shore may grow brighter, and the thought of home more welcome,—with those in life's midday, that this fleeting world may not be all in all, that earth's clamour may not drown the spirit's voice, nor time's possessions in one scale outweigh the soul in the other,—with the young, that weak feet may walk circumspectly in slippery places, and the great Creator be constantly remembered in the heyday of youth;—the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, and with you all to the end. To gather up the spirit of the whole, in other and better words than mine, let me say, "Friends, and brothers, in the midst of your work, when you are trying to be honest and faithful, and finding how hard it is to be honest and

faithful ; in your family circles ; as English citizens ; in lonely hours, when you are struggling with temptations, which only the Searcher of hearts knows ; when you are trying to pray, and cannot pray ; when all things in heaven and earth seem unstable ; when you are crushed with the remembrances of failures ; when you are looking in vain for faces that once comforted you ; in your tribulation, as in your wealth ; in the hour of death ; in that day of judgment, which shall show us how closely we have been related to each other, and what a Divine power has been using even the feeblest instrument to draw us to itself,—may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

